

HAPPIER WITH YOU



BY FANGIRLINGSTRANGERTHINGS

Happier With You by FangirlingStrangerThings

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Summary: El left a heart broken Mike 2 years ago to fight in the final battle against Brenner and the lab with her fellow subjects. Now El has returned to Hawkins, Mike is shocked to see she isn't alone. Can they reunite? Or is El happier with someone else? A FanFiction story full of mature content, angst and drama. Complete.

1. When Hearts Break

Happier With You

Author's Note - Hi all! So this is a very different story to my other Fanfiction The Life You Deserve. So be prepared for lots of angst and drama! I hope you enjoy and please let me know what you think!

Chapter 1 - When Hearts Break

El rushed around her room, routing in her closet for the perfect sweater to wear for her date with Mike to the cinema. She eventually picked a soft white slim fitting one that she knew with a smirk Mike loved.

She brushed her thick locks and then chucked on Mike's navy blue jacket that she had stolen years earlier. El looked around her room making sure it was ready for her dad's inspection later that evening.

He had moaned to her that morning that she needed to get her room cleaned and that it was a state. El had guessed he was kind of right, there had been clothes strewn everywhere, including bits of popcorn and candy from her and Max's sleepover the day before.

El looked at her room with pride now. Her walls were light pink partially covered by a large collage board filled to the brim with photos of her friends, her dad and Joyce and of her and Mike.

There were photos of them kissing, one of him giving her a piggy back ride, a photo of them in the lake together whilst they tried to recreate the Dirty Dancing pose and then little notes here and there where he'd wrote he loved her in his messy scrawl.

Combine that with her soft white furniture and her framed photo of her and Mike at prom next to her double bed and the room was absolutely perfect. It was everything she hadn't known she was allowed to dream of.

But they were 17 now and El felt well and truly safe in Hawkins. So

safe that she had started her life with vigour.

She had experienced summers camping and swimming, teenage arguments with her dad, school dances, sleepovers, sneaking over to Mike's, her first time making out, learning to drive, her special first time with Mike and the many times after that.

El was truly happy and it was a feeling she had allowed herself to embrace and not shy away from.

There was suddenly a sharp set of knocking at the front door and El frowned to herself as she went to answer it, knowing it didn't sound anything like Mike's gentle knock.

Not having to be cautious any more, El immediately opened the door with a smile which immediately dropped.

Her eyes widened as she took in the sight in front of her. On the last step of Hopper and Joyce's house was Kali. El would recognise her anywhere despite the years that had passed.

But she wasn't alone.

Stood behind her on the faded grass where four other people, all their ages ranging. Two women and two men.

"Kali...what...what is this?" El gaped out in shock.

"We need your help Jane." Kali said before she nodded her head to the group and they all raised their bare arms up in the air and twisted their wrist slightly.

El's breath caught in her throat as she looked wildly between their wrists, specifically at the tattoos that had been forced there. 003, 005, 009 and 010.

"I-I don't understand..." El said pacing the living room whilst running her shaking hands through her hair.

"It's very simple Jane." Kali said sitting on the arm of the couch whilst the others stood and watched Eleven with interest.

"Brenner is alive and has been finding subjects all over the country. He has murdered Four and Six and...Seven." Kali's voice choking on her last words.

"We *need* to end this. We need to end *him* Jane."

El turned to look at them all, a million emotions swirling through her brain. She felt like these people were instantly her family, she wanted to help them desperately. But she also didn't, *couldn't* leave her life and most importantly the people in it.

"So are you going to help us?" A blonde boy who looked a similar age to El piped up, causing her eyes to meet his blue eyes for a moment.

"This is Hunter or ten. He has the ability to heal. That is Sam or three, he's got super strength. Over there is five or Fifi, she has the ability to control the elements and this is Emma or nine who is a shape shifter." Kali said pointing everyone out.

El looked at the people in front of her, Sam was tall, broad and dark skinned, Fifi had bright red hair and wore an excited smile, whilst Emma looked as dark and dangerous as her jet black hair. Hunter on the other hand gave her a small welcoming smile.

El gulped at these strong people, "w-why do you need me?" she asked vulnerably.

"Well whilst we all have our own powers, we cannot track where this lab is. We cannot track them. *Him*." Kali explained seriously.

El sighed and hid her face in her hands with frustration. This was absolute madness. Was she just meant to drop her whole life, drop *him*?

But despite her heart already frantically panicking in her chest, she knew what she needed to do. She knew what she had always needed to do. There was no way around this, she needed to finish this with her fellow survivors.

"It's only a matter of time before they find you Jane. We tracked you down after 3 weeks of searching." Kali said simply, solidifying El's decision.

10 minutes later El was rushing around her room with a duffle bag, hurriedly packing clothes and anything she thought she might need.

She looked up at her collage board and tears sprang down her cheeks as she shakily started to remove the photos and Mike's notes, stuffing them quickly into her bag.

El hurried to her desk and pulled out some paper. She started writing a letter to her dad and Joyce, apologising and explaining that she was doing this to keep everyone safe. To try and end this, once and for all.

She then turned to a blank piece of paper to start writing something for Mike. But her quivering hand just couldn't do it. What on earth could she tell him? What words would be good enough?

Just then she heard the sound of a car pulling up and her heart almost fell out of her body as she recognised the sound of the engine.

El raced into the living room to find the subjects all backing up panicked, concerned as to who had arrived.

She turned to them, her eyes red from crying. "I-It's my b-boyfriend." She said in a broken voice.

El saw guilt in Kali's eyes for a moment before she put her guard up. "You need to tell him to leave Jane. He could be in danger. He could be killed."

Her words were enough to cause El to walk over to the front door and walk numbly down the steps to Mike who was getting out of his car.

"Hey babe!" he called happily locking the car. "You ready to go?"

El froze about 5 feet away from him, her whole body shaking from her sobs.

Mike turned to her and his beautiful smile instantly wiped from his face. "What's wrong?!" he asked her in a panic closing the space between them and moving his hands to her arms.

His hands warm against her cold skin, his touch soothing her slightly because he was her *home*.

"I-I need to g-go. K-Kali...she's b-back for m-me." El cried, her heart breaking piece by piece.

Mike's eyes were wide and terrified. "I-I don't understand El. What do you mean she's back for you?!"

El gasped as she tried to breathe through the pain rushing around her body like poison. "K-Kali and the others are here for me. They need m-me. B-Brenner is still alive. He is k-killing us. We need to s-stop him."

Mike stared at her in stunned silence for a moment, his grip on her arms tightening.

"Then I'll come with you." He said in a hoarse voice.

El sobbed and shook her head, the tears spilling down to her heaving chest. "N-no. You can't. It's not safe for you."

She saw anger fill Mike's terrified eyes. "No! I don't care if it's not safe. I'm not leaving you *ever*."

El cried and pulled Mike to her, she wept into the blue sweater he was wearing whilst he wrapped his arms around her like she was the most precious thing in the whole world.

They could have stayed in the embrace forever.

"Jane?" came Kali's cautious voice.

Mike broke the embrace to look behind El in shock as Kali, Sam, Hunter, Fifi and Emma came out of the house. Hunter holding El's duffle bag.

"You know he can't come with us." Kali said calmly, but there was a shake to her voice.

El felt Mike physically shaking but she sighed and nodded slowly to Kali, "I know."

"You can't just come here and think you can take her away from her *f-family*, from *me*." Mike screamed at Kali and the others, his voice angry but incredibly broken.

Kali sighed and stepped closer, "we need her. We are her *family* too. And we need to stop the man who ruined our lives, who *murdered* our family and will continue to *murder* our family if we do not stop him."

"Well then let me come!" Mike shouted, his body quivering.

"No. Brenner will know you are a weakness. He will use you against Jane. He will easily have you killed."

At these words El found a small flicker of strength behind her complete and utter pain. She turned to Mike but couldn't meet his eyes.

"I *have* to go Mike. *Alone*. Y-you need to s-stay. Y-you need to go on without me." She said wishing she could take back each word and the pain she knew she had just inflicted on him.

Mike looked at her wildly whilst Kali nodded at the others and they all started heading to a dark van.

"Are you *kidding* me?!" he screamed, El's heart crushed for every ounce of his pain.

"I'm s-so sorry." El cried as she made to move towards the van too, knowing she couldn't even bare to touch him because she would never stop.

"No!" She heard him cry, before he tried to reach out and grasp her hand to pull her back.

El quickly moved her wrist away and continued on towards the van, her body almost ready to collapse from the pain she felt.

She was suddenly almost pulled to the floor whilst Mike sunk to his knees and grabbed onto her legs. "No! *Please* don't go!" he sobbed into her jeans.

El cried, still staring at the van, knowing she couldn't look at him in

that moment because it would be the end of her.

"I h-have to. I...I am s-so s-sorry Mike. I l-love you." She gasped knowing as she closed her eyes what she was going to have to do.

Mike's arms against his own will were pulled from her legs with her magnetic force. "No!" he screamed clearly knowing what she had done.

El carried on walking, almost running to the van. "No! El! *Please!*" His words making her sob aloud as she got into the van and looked back at Mike.

He was still on the floor being held back from her by her magnetic force. He was crying, his whole body shaking, his face completely broken.

"Good bye Mike." El cried as the last piece of her heart shattered.

2. Empty

Happier With You

Author's Note: Be prepared for some more angst! Hope you enjoy this one and please let me know what you think :-)

Chapter 2: Empty

353 Days Later, 1989.

The music was deafeningly as Mike hesitantly entered Danny Robertson's large house party with Dustin, Lucas, Max and Will.

It was the last party of senior year and the first one that Mike had been to in way over 353 days.

He looked around with a frown at the crowded warm room, "alright you got me here. Can I leave now?" he said turning back to his friends.

"Mike's that's not the spirit!" Dustin said reproachfully.

"Yeah man you might actually have some fun," Lucas said patting his shoulder.

Mike scowled at them, "I highly doubt that."

Max rolled her eyes and grabbed Lucas's hand, "let's get a drink. I can't stand the negativity *all* the time."

Mike watched them disappear with a glare. "Negativity...coming from *her*, the sarcasm queen!"

Dustin sighed and Will gave Mike a hesitant smile, "come on man let's go get a drink and have a look around."

He begrudgingly followed his friends through the crowd of seniors, some he didn't even recognise. Mike was counting down the days until he left for Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The acceptance letter had been the only good thing to happen to him in over 353 days, but it had been bitter sweet. It should have been a moment that he cherished with *her*.

"Here you go buddy, get that down you." Dustin smiled handing Mike a red plastic cup filled with a golden looking liquid.

Mike sniffed it cautiously and quickly recoiled. "What even is this?!"

Dustin shrugged as he poured Will the same drink. "I don't know, whatever they've mixed in the punch bowl."

Mike looked down at his cup and took a hesitant sip. Once you got past the extremely strong taste and smell, it wasn't too bad. It at least warmed Mike's cold chest.

He started to gulp down the drink, realising that if he was stuck at this damn party at least he could be buzzed.

"Fill me up please," He said to Dustin handed him the empty cup.

His friends looked at him wearily. "Dude I don't think you need another one just y-"

"I said fill me up!" Mike said irritated.

Dustin mouthed a slow "okaay" and filled the cup again, handing it over.

The party was in full swing. Dustin had joined Lucas and Max at the keg and Will was busy chatting in the corner with a guy from his art class.

Mike whose head was spinning from the lights in the room had stumbled over to a couch and was nursing his drink.

"Oh my god it's so hot in here," a girl moaned as she took the spare seat next to him. She turned to him and smiled kindly. "Oh hi Mike!"

Mike slowly turned his head and squinted at her, taking in her appearance. "Oh...hi J-Jen." He said realising it was Jennifer Hayes.

She grinned at him, "enjoying the party?" she asked in a friendly tone.

Mike shrugged, all his movements feeling like they had slowed down considerably. "Not really," he mumbled before taking a sip of his drink.

Jen laughed slightly, "me neither to be honest. Jasmine's off making out with Danny and I lost Tracey like an hour ago!"

Mike didn't say anything, not really caring about Jasmine or Tracey's whereabouts.

There was silence between the pair for a moment as they both sipped at their drinks. Jen seemed to look into the crowd and smirk to herself.

"I can't believe Will turned out to be gay...I had the *biggest* crush on him!"

The smallest of smiles appeared on Mike's face as he tried to look for Will in the crowd, but his vision was a bit blurry.

"Yeah...I r-remember you c-crying at his f-funeral." Mike said stumbling over his words.

Jen laughed cringing, shaking her head. "I know right! And it wasn't even him. I'm glad he was okay..."

Mike nodded sluggishly, "yeah me t-" The music suddenly changed making his words be lost in his shaky breathe.

Every breath you take, every move you make.

Jen watched Mike who had frozen, his eyes wide. "You okay?" she asked him quietly.

Mike's eyes sprang with tears. "T-this song...me and El..." No more words could come out as he gasped to try and control his emotions.

"Oh Mike..." Jen said sadly. "Want to go somewhere to talk?"

Mike nodded slowly through his sobs and he let Jen help him up from the couch. He stumbled in his drunk state and she held onto him to keep his body steady.

Jen took him by the arm gently and they walked around looking for somewhere quiet. When she gave up looking downstairs, they headed upstairs, eventually finding an empty bedroom.

Mike sunk down onto the edge of the bed, sniffing as he tried to wipe at his tears. Jen came and sat down next to him, rubbing his back supportably.

"Me and El...f-first danced to that song at the s-snow ball." He said, his shoulders shaking with the grief he felt for the love of his life.

Jen didn't say anything and just listened to him carefully.

"I...I t-thought she'd be back by now. I...I've tried c-calling for her." He said, his words fumbling all over again as he tried and failed to keep his composure.

Mike sobbed and Jen frowned, "I thought she moved away?" she asked confused at his words.

He shrugged, not knowing what to say. "She...she left *me*." His words dripping in pain and unresolved anger.

Jen sighed, "well I know what it's like to be broken up with. I was dating Tommy for-"

"No this is different!" Mike said abruptly surprising Jen who just watched him for another minute.

"She...she *broke* my *heart*." He cried out, all pretence gone as he sobbed onto Jen's shoulder as she hesitantly pulled him into a hug.

Mike closed his eyes, breathing in Jen's floral perfume from her shoulder as she stroked his hair, he hadn't had his hair stroked since...*her*.

The comfort it gave him was unimaginable. If he shut his eyes he could pretend she was doing it.

"I'm sorry for what you've been through Mike...but if she broke your heart this bad, then maybe you deserve better. I mean maybe there's someone more suited to you out there." Jen said trying to calm him down.

"I'm sure there's a girl out there who would treat you-" Jen's words were blocked by Mike who had suddenly looked up and kissed her full on the mouth.

He pulled away, his eyes dilated and his throat dry from the sharp taste of alcohol. "S-sorry." He mumbled.

Jen's eyes were wide with shock. "It's...it's okay." She told him breathlessly.

They stared at each other for a moment before their lips crashed together. Jen's arms wrapped around his neck and she pulled herself closer to Mike's body.

His shaking hands moved to her hips and he pulled her down onto the bed, their legs tangling together as their kiss become more heated, more desperate.

Jen's hand moved quickly under Mike's shirt reaching up his shaking abdomen, her hand flat against his skin.

He moved a hand to her hair and when he realised it wasn't the thick curly hair he desired, he quickly dropped his hand back to her hips.

Mike focused his energy on kissing her, nibbling her lower lip as she gasped against him. She tugged at his hair with her free hand and pulled him in even closer.

He could feel his arousal building. He was sick and tired of being in the darkest depths of hell. He need to feel *something*.

"I need you," he groaned against her lips as she nodded quickly in response. "Okay," she gasped pushing him down onto the bed and straddling his lap.

Mike leaned up to meet her lips again before she reached down and pulled her dress over her head, leaving her in black lace underwear.

Before he could even try and remind his brain that this wasn't El, she started to unbutton his shirt quickly and threw it off his shoulders.

Mike only watched, his heart racing with trepidation as she unzipped his black jeans and pulled them down his legs, he kicked them off and they landed on the floor with the rest of their clothes.

Jen attacked him with her lips, kissing him eagerly, her lips trailing down his neck and onto his chest.

Mike shut his eyes and imagined El was doing this to him, he groaned as he saw her stunningly beautiful naked body in his mind.

He moved his hands onto her hips and gripped her skin, desperately grinding against her core making her moan and throw her head back in pleasure.

Mike flipped Jen over so she was laying on the mattress and he quickly discarded her panties, wanting the afterglow of sex as soon as possible.

Her fingers moved to the sides of his underwear and she pushed them down with force. Mike kicked them off his body as she moved up the bed slightly so her head was on the pillow.

Mike crawled up her body and moved her thighs apart slightly to line himself up. He entered her quickly and crashed his body on top of hers, keeping himself up just by his elbows.

He pushed his head into the dip in her shoulder and closed his eyes whilst he moved against her, clumsy and desperately.

Mike gasped as the pleasure mixed with the pain in his chest. He kept his eyes shut tightly as he saw in his minds eye El underneath him, whimpering his name.

He sped up, getting into a rhythm, the one El had always loved. Mike took slowly and deep thrusts as he heard her gasp and dig her fingers into his back.

Whilst their hips met each other and he kept his head in her shoulder, he didn't dare touch her with his hands, keeping them flat

either side of her.

He knew if he touched her, he'd know this wasn't El. He knew El's body like a beautiful map. He knew where she was ticklish, which areas made her gasp when he kissed her and how she liked him to touch her with such tender love.

Mike's thrusts became quicker and he moved deeper into her core whilst she moaned in his ear. He started to pound into her, desperate for his release, desperate for the endorphin rush.

Jen cried out as he pounded her, and gripped him even tighter as he pushed her over the edge. He felt her muscles squeezing him as he drove into her again and again until the orgasm captured him.

Mike gasped into her shoulder and slowed trying to catch his breath. He lay on top of her for a moment trying to get his dizzy head together.

He pulled back as he looked at her face, a shock hit his chest. Those weren't hazel eyes looking back at him. Mike stumbled up onto his hands and pulled out.

He crawled to the end of the bed and tried to control his shaking as he sat down on the edge. "I'm...so sorry." He gasped.

He heard movement and saw in his peripheral vision that Jen got off the bed and was searching for her clothes. He couldn't look at her.

"It's okay Mike," she told him breathlessly as she put on her underwear.

He shook his head looking at the floor, "no...no it's not okay. I...took a-advantage of you. I am so sorry."

Jen rolled her eyes as she put her dress back on. "Mike you didn't take *advantage* of me. I'm soberer than you...if anything, I took advantage of *you*. So *I'm* sorry." She said biting her lip nervously.

Mike reached for his underwear and just as he was putting them on, his eyes widened as he realised he had forgotten something.

"I didn't use a condom..."

Jen smiled slightly, "that's okay I'm on the pill." She said shrugging as she put her shoes back on.

Mike frowned watching her, why was she so cool about this? He felt completely and utterly disgusted with himself.

He felt dirty, like he had just cheated on the ghost of El. Instead of feeling an endorphin rush, he felt empty. He had never regretted something so much in his life.

Jen turned and looked at him, smiling sadly. "If you ever get over El give me a call."

Mike watched in disbelief as she left the room, leaving him sat on the bed in just his underwear feeling horrified at himself.

What kind of man sleeps with a girl he barely knows? And does it whilst pretending it's someone else? Him that was who.

Mike groaned in frustration and got up from the bed, chucking on his jeans and his shirt.

Mike didn't even look for his friends, he just left the party completely.

It was a 20 minute walk home, but he didn't care. He needed the cold air, it sobered him up considerably but the peace and quiet also made him remember what he'd done.

He raked his hands painfully through his sweaty hair as he stumbled home and tried desperately not to allow his mind to replay the last hour.

He finally arrived home numb and in a heavy shock as he climbed the stairs, completely zoning out from his mom's words of concern asking him if he was ill.

Mike locked the bathroom door and slowly peeled his clothes off, the material stuck to his sweating skin.

He turned the shower on and got in, immediately putting his body under the shower head, pushing his hair back with a sweep of his hand.

Mike closed his eyes and allowed the water to rush over his face and into his mouth as he tried to breathe through the inevitable pain that was itching to be released.

He thought about the day El had left, the utter devastation it had caused not only him but her family and her friends. Hopper had almost hit him, screaming that he should have stopped El. Max had been especially devastated too and kept on saying if she had been there she could have stopped El from going.

No one could punish him more than himself though. He knew he was no match for her power, but maybe if he could have said something...*anything* to make her put the shield down.

He had convinced himself that with all those subjects together, they could have easily done this task quickly and he'd have El back with him in no time.

But she didn't come back, he counted the days, the months...and now he had reached 353 days and it was beyond harrowing for him.

Mike's shoulders started to shake, no longer able to hold the heavy burden of his emotions. He gasped as tears started to rush down his cheeks, mixing with the warm water of the shower.

He slowly knelt until he was on his knees, his body no longer strong enough to carry him. He cried out, his hands covering his face as he sobbed for the love of his life who was never coming back.

El knew she shouldn't do it, it only hurt more. But it had been 353 days and she was desperate.

She shut the bedroom door of the cabin they had broken into in Michigan and turned to the radio on the window sill, moving her head to the left slightly as she went through the stations until she found static.

El sat down on the edge of the bed and closed her eyes, focusing solely on Mike, allowing her mind to be filled with him for the first time in a long time.

She opened her eyes and found herself in the void, taking a sigh of relief that it had happened so quickly.

El looked around and saw a bedroom she didn't recognise materialise. She stepped forward with confusion, thinking her eyes were playing a trick on her.

She could see two people tangled up together on the bed making out. El moved closer, her heart pounding like crazy.

Her eyes widened with horror when she saw the familiar mop of dark hair, the hair that only *she* touched...but now someone else had their hand grasped in the beautiful locks.

No...this couldn't be real. This boy might look like Mike but it couldn't be *her* Mike.

"I need you," he groaned against the girl's lips as she nodded quickly in response. "Okay," she gasped pushing him down onto the bed and straddling his lap.

El's chest heaved as she hyperventilated, tears streaming down her face as the girl who she now recognised as Jennifer Hayes took off her dress.

"No!" El screamed her voice coming out in a sob. Her eyes frozen to the couple as Mike kissed Jennifer and then she started to unbutton his shirt.

No, no, no!" El cried tearing at her hair and forcing herself to try and look away. This wasn't real, this wasn't *real*!

The girl started to unzip Mike's jeans and El found herself screaming again, "stop it! STOP IT!"

A concerned male voice entered the void, "El?"

Next thing El knew she was being shaken and she opened her eyes to

see Hunter staring straight at her, his hands on her arms in surprise.

"Are you okay?! You've been screaming! What did you see?" his voice was full of panic but all El could do was cry.

She shoved his hands off her and stumbled off the bed, running through the cabin as fast as she could. Her legs shaking as she made her way to the edge of the lake.

El screamed with an unprecedented anger and the water in front of her exploded with a force separating down the middle all the way to the other end of the lake. It may have been late at night, but the water still shone through the moonlight.

"Woah! Are you that moses guy or something?" Hunter's playful voice carried to her as he walked the distance from the cabin to the lake's edge where El was stood trembling with rage.

She couldn't speak as she replayed the images in her head again and again, like a mind torture.

For one moment, a glimmer of hope took her by surprise, "is...is Kali home yet?" She said, desperate to know if Kali had planted all of that in her head.

"Nope her, Emma and Sam are still getting supplies...why?" Hunter asked curiously.

El gasped out a breath, her last hope dying in her heart. That had been Mike. It was *real*.

She numbly sat down on the wet sand, moving her legs up to her chest and wrapping her arms around herself.

Hunter quietly came and sat down next to her, his long muscular legs spread out in front of him as he looked out at the lake.

"You can tell me what's bothering you, you know. I might be able to help."

El looked at the ground as silent tears fell from her eyes. "Nothing you can say can help me right now." She mumbled.

Hunter shrugged and they stayed in silence for a long time.

"I wanted to see M-Mike in the void...he was...h-he was with another girl." El finally said, her voice breaking, her words heavy with pain.

Hunter frowned and moved his hand onto her back in comfort, "I'm sorry El..."

She sniffed and wiped at her tears. "It's my fault...I told him to move on. But after everything we have been through together...I didn't think it would be that quick." El said as more silent tears fell down her pale cheeks.

"And it h-hurts like h-hell." She wept leaning her head down into her crossed arms.

Silence fell on the two of them once more until Hunter coughed awkwardly, "well...I know there isn't anything I can say to make you feel better...but there might be something I can do."

El looked up at him in confusion. "What do you mean?"

He smiled slightly, "you're not the only one with a power remember."

Her eyes widened as he turned his hands so his palms were on show. "I can't mend your broken heart...but I can take the pain away from what you've seen tonight." He told her softly.

El froze watching him with wonder and quickly nodded her head. Desperate for the pain to be gone.

Hunter sighed, "okay...well seeing as it's from your heart, do you mind if I?" he gestured from his hand to her chest.

El gulped and nodded again. Hunter leaned in closer and placed his hand over her trembling heart. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes.

El closed her eyes too as she felt a warmth spreading from his hand, it seeped into her heart and then rushed through her veins. It felt like hot chocolate on a winters day, like the comfort of an embrace and the beauty of a sunset.

Hunter slowly pulled his hand away and looked at El, hazel eyes locking on blue eyes.

"How do you feel?" he whispered.

El stared back at him, "better" she admitted. The memory was still there from what she had seen and the confusion and anger lay deep within her mind. But for the moment, she felt no pain. She no longer felt broken.

"*Thank you*," she said, her words laced in gratitude.

Hunter side smiled, "any time." He stood up and held out a hand for her.

El hesitantly took it and they walked slowly back to the cabin.

"So...why the name Hunter?" she asked randomly.

He grinned and shrugged, "well I much prefer it to ten and I don't know...I just thought it sounded bad ass."

El laughed gently, "it's bitchin."

3. Move On

Happier With You

Author's Note: I just want to say thank you for the amazing reviews of the story so far! :-) It's been a rough ride of emotions writing the story, but we are getting close to the battle against the lab, so buckle up and enjoy!

Chapter 3 – Move On

Fall 1989

Mike sweated as he heaved the final sealed box into his new dorm room and placed it on top of two others.

He wiped his brow and looked around the room with a smile. This was going to be his fresh start.

Mike picked up his bottle of water and took a swig, now frowning at the prospect of unpacking. Who actually enjoyed unpacking? Or packing in general?

His dark eyes fell on Dustin's empty area of the dorm room for a moment with an amused smile. His best friend had decided that locating the nearest coffee shops and dinners was much more important than moving his stuff in.

Mike shook his head and got to work unpacking, noticing with a grimace that his mum had packed his old teddy bear Jim. It had been a present off *her* and Hopper had thought it would be hilarious to name the damn thing Jim so that Mike knew he was always watching him.

Mike sighed and chucked the bear back into the box and just stared at it as a thousand memories rushed through his mind. Her voice, her laugh, her smile, her moans when she was underneath him.

Just to taunt him his mind began replaying the sounds Jen had made and he winched as guilt washed over him once again.

He wished more than anything that the night with Jen had never happened.

He hadn't told a soul about it and had begrudgingly gone to a sexual health clinic just to make sure he was clean after being unprotected.

He was clean of course and then he felt more guilt towards Jen as if he was somehow insinuating that she was dirty. He was the one who felt dirty.

Mike took a gulp of water, really wishing that he didn't have to think about all this crap today. It was his first day of college for god's sake.

As if on cue, Dustin burst into the room with an ecstatic grin on his face. Mike noticed that he still hadn't brought one box up.

"Mike you're not going to *believe* what I've just done!" he said gleefully.

Mike watched him amused from the floor, sat in front of his boxes. "What?"

"Well I've just managed to score us a date with two *incredibly* hot girls!"

Mike's smile immediately faltered. "Why...why would you do that?" He asked irritated as he carried on rifling through his box.

"Well it started because Daisy said she couldn't go on a date with me unless we got a date for her friend Lexie. So I thought it'd kill two birds with one stone. I get a date and you get a date!" Dustin spoke as if this was the most obvious thing in the world.

Mike sighed and shook his head, "I'm sorry dude but I don't want to go on a date."

Dustin groaned and walked closer to Mike. "Is this because of El?"

Mike felt like a million shards of ice hit his chest at the mention of her name. "N-No..." he choked out.

His friend heaved a sigh and then collapsed onto the floor next to

him. "Mike...you *need* to get over her. I know she was the love of your life and everything but this *isn't* healthy!"

Mike glared at Dustin, "I *have* got over her..." He lied.

Dustin snorted and reached into the box, "oh really?" His hands grasped around a load of photos and he pulled them up into sight. "Then what is all of this?"

Mike's dark eyes roamed over the photos painfully. He knew exactly what they were. They were some of the happiest moments he had shared with *her*. Their faces happy and so in love in every photo.

"They're just...memories." He gasped out, desperate to say anything to ease the awkwardness.

Dustin shrugged and placed the photos back in the box. "This is your new start Mike. Time to make new memories and actually *enjoy* yourself for once." He said kindly with a supportive smile.

Mike couldn't look at him but nodded his head slowly. If he was going to try and get over her anywhere, it may as well be at MIT, far from Hawkins and the ghosts of his past.

"Do you think Kali is mad at me?" El asked Hunter as she nursed her coffee mug. They were sat on the steps outside of the large trailer they were occupying in Georgia.

Hunter grinned slowly, "no she's not mad at you. I think she's just frustrated. I think we *all* thought we would have killed that son of a bitch by now." He said contemplatively before sipping at his coffee.

El frowned and looked out towards the morning sun rising. Finding Brenner and the lab hadn't been as easy as she would have assumed.

Knowing that El could track them, the lab had put up a defence shield against her mind and she was struggling to break it down.

"Why is he killing us off instead of trying to use our powers?" El couldn't help but ask the question that had been intriguing her for some time now.

Hunter looked at her and half smiled, "it's because bits of information about what he's been up to all these years are starting to leak slowly and he's facing life imprisonment. He is trying to destroy *any* piece of evidence from his past...which includes *us*."

"He already captured and murdered Four and Six before we could get to them. And then we had a near miss and Seven or as we called him Sebastian, stayed behind to try and distract them...he got killed too."

El watched the sadness in Hunter's blue eyes for a moment before speaking. "Was Seven...was he your friend?"

The blonde man nodded his head and smiled sadly. "Yeah he was my friend. But him and Kali...well they were in love."

El gasped at this information. It explained so much about Kali's recent behaviour and how easy she closed up when El would ask about the others.

They stayed silent for a moment, both of them lost in thought. El couldn't begin to imagine how Kali must have felt. It was the exact reason why she knew Mike could never have come with them.

At the mere thought of his name, El felt her chest clench painfully. Despite what she had seen in the void, she still missed him terribly.

She had been trying to keep track of the days and she was almost sure he would be starting college right about now. The thought of all the dreams they had made together twisted like a knife in her stomach.

El could feel herself starting to quiver from the emotions eating at her heart and knew she had to try and distract herself from the pain.

"What about you? What is your story?" El asked turning back to Hunter who looked slightly surprised at the question.

"Well I got out of Hawkins lab during the second mass break out. I'm a year older than you, but I was only six, so Sam carried me on his shoulders and we fled."

"I ended up with Sam for about six years, we're like brothers in a

way. But then we got separated when that bastard found our location." Hunter's voice became dangerous for a moment as El watched him with awe.

He sighed, "I was taken in by this farming family in West Virginia. I can honestly say I was happy there. I lived with them until I was 16."

El frowned, "why did you leave then?"

Hunter looked at her and she immediately saw the pain etched in his eyes. "They were murdered...all of them. Because of me."

She froze, feeling horrified at her question. El carefully placed her hand on top of Hunter's in what she hoped was a comforting act.

"Yeah I came back from town to find they had all been killed. The bastard had found out where I lived. I tried...I *tried* to heal them. I was there for *hours* trying to heal them...but they were already dead."

A single tear dared to fall from Hunter's blue eyes and El immediately pulled him into an embrace. Her head laying on his shoulder, his cheek against her hair.

"I'm so sorry..." she told him softly.

Hunter sniffed and nuzzled his head slightly into her curly locks.

"Okay break it up you two we have work to do." Came Emma's solemn voice.

El and Hunter immediately sprang apart, both of them feeling oddly guilty.

Emma was stood in the door way with her arms crossed staring at them. They both rushed to their feet and followed her into the trailer.

The first thought that entered El's mind when she entered the void was why was she doing this.

She turned and saw Mike sitting at a desk, a text book in front of him. El couldn't stop the immediate rush of love that filled her.

More of the room came to light and she looked around at his new dorm room with interest before walking closer to him.

"Are you ready yet?" Came Dustin's voice making El jump. She turned to see with happy surprise her old friend who had just finished buttoning up a shirt.

Mike turned to look at Dustin and El's stomach jumped with delight when she got to see his face. He looked very much the same, but taller, his cheek bones even more prominent. His face more angular.

"Yeah I've been ready for like an hour Dustin..." Mike said rolling his eyes before turning back to his text book.

"Sorry okay! So sue me if I want to look *good* for my date."

Mike scoffed, "so are you saying I *don't* look good for *my* date?"

El's heart stopped at his words and a heavy feeling set in her stomach. Mike was going on a date? She really didn't know why she was surprised after what she had last seen in the void.

Dustin laughed, "no you do look good man...you'd look even better if you wiped that bitch face off your pretty features!" he teased.

Mike frowned. "I'm sorry I'm just...nervous I guess."

El watched as her old friend walked closer to Mike and patted him on the shoulder. "This will be good for you Mike. You deserve to be happy, you deserve to live a good normal life."

She gulped as every word Dustin said hit home. He was so right that it pained her.

Mike deserved much more than she could offer him. She didn't know when and if she would ever be able to return to Hawkins. Why make him chase a ghost from his past?

El wiped at the tears and watched as Mike sighed and nodded. "I guess." He mumbled.

She couldn't see anymore. She knew in that moment she couldn't visit

him in the void again.

El needed to move on too if she had any chance of destroying Brenner and the lab. She sobbed as she left the most important part of her life behind.

4. This Is War

Happier With You

Author's Note: Thank you again so much for the awesome reviews! :-)
It means so much!

So it's battle time and Brenner is about to get what he deserves! I think you will all be happy to know that the big reunion we are all ready for is going to happen in the next chapter!

Chapter 4 – This Is War

Early Summer 1990.

The block was like a mass of brick walls and every day El tried to chip away at it, brick by brick.

It was exhausting and took up all of her energy. But she knew there was no way to find Brenner and the lab without it.

El zoned back in again on her anger. She thought about the memories her mama had shown her, focusing on the electro shock therapy, the look on her mama's beautiful face as her life was destroyed.

The wall shook slightly, debris falling slightly into the darkness, a few bricks here and there being pushed through.

El gasped coming to the present, Hunter kneeling in front of her, his eyes concerned. Both her nostrils and ears bleeding.

This has become their daily routine. El would search and try to break down the wall, Hunter would heal her afterwards.

He placed his hand on her head and she immediately felt the banging migraine disappear. "Thank you," she breathed out in relief.

"You don't need to keep thanking me." He said slightly amused as he wiped at her nose with a wet cloth.

She watched him whilst he cleaned her up. Hunter had been the

nicest one of the group to her since the first day when she could barely breathe or talk from her grief for Mike.

Kali was always there for her, but her sister was guarded and clearly doing some grieving of her own.

Sam and Fifi were nice enough, but El definitely had the feeling that Emma didn't like her much. She felt a wave of resentment from her on a daily basis.

"How did you get on?" Kali asked her head coming up from a table full of maps, building plans and newspaper clippings. Emma, Sam and Fifi were stood around her.

"Better. I could feel a bit of the defence coming down." El answered as she walked fully into the room with Hunter behind her.

Emma glared at El, "how much longer?" she asked in a monotone voice.

There was silence in the room whilst El frowned, stunned that she had even dared to ask that question.

None of them really knew how hard she had worked with that wall. It was an immense force and she tried daily to break it down.

"I don't *know* how much longer." El said coldly.

"This is ridiculous. We need a new plan. We can't rely on *her* to do this. It's been *two* years."

"Don't talk to her like that!" Hunter growled from behind El, staring at Emma.

She laughed, "of course *you'd* say that!"

"And what's that supposed to mean?!" Hunter barked.

"Alright, enough!" Kali shouted joining in.

"No I'm sorry but she's useless! We tracked her for *this*? Just so we could be on the run *again*!"

El felt herself shaking from anger. "I am *trying* my best! I don't see *you* doing anything!"

Emma glared at her, giving her an intense look before her entire appearance completely changed.

El gaped in horror and wonder as Mike stared back at her.

"Do you reckon you'd get more work done if I looked like this?" His voice asked coldly.

Everyone else froze, physically feeling the anger pound through El's body.

"Stop..." El's voice coming out shaking with fury.

Mike smirked back at her and crossed his arms.

"*Stop* looking like him *right now*." El warned once more, her voice dripping with danger.

"Oh what's wrong Jane? Can't cope with a blast from the past?" The words came out with malice from Mike's lips.

El couldn't cope a second longer. She flung her hands out and screamed with fury as Emma went flying through the air, her appearance turning back to normal as she was slammed into the wall.

"Enough! That's enough!" Kali shouted between the girls as Emma scrambled up and made for El.

Hunter stepped in front of her and scowled. "That was pretty low Emma even for *you*!"

"We need to stop fighting between each other and remember who the real *evil* is!" Kali shouted in frustration.

El wasn't listening, she needed to get out of here. She paced out of the log cabin and slammed the door closed behind her with her mind.

She ran towards the river that she knew lay at the bottom of the narrow wooded area outside of the cabin.

El collapsed to the ground in front of the water and cried into her hands, the images of Emma's version of Mike racing through her mind. His voice, the anger in his eyes. It killed her.

She didn't think she had ever truly felt anger like this and with a gasp realised that maybe she could use it.

El sat on her knees and placed her hands in her lap, shutting her wet eyes and trying to focus on Brenner and the lab.

Within seconds she was in front of the disturbed brick wall. With fury rushing through her veins and determination in her hands, she moved them forwards and screamed with all her might.

Emma came into her mind, all the tests El had been forced to do for Brenner, the demogorgon, her mama's memories and Mike in the arms of some one else, his shortened breath and gasp in her ears.

She screeched louder and with a shake that could be caused by an earth quake the wall fell, layer by layer, brick by brick.

"Jane? Jane!"

El slowly opened her eyes, her vision blurred, her limbs weak as she lay in the grass.

Hunter and Kali had rushed over to her, kneeling on the dry grass either side of her.

"I...I k-know where the lab is. I know where *he* is." Her teeth chattered as she spoke slowly. Her eyes closing as she passed out.

The group arrived in Texas the next day, watching the lab from a distance whilst they got an idea for the levels of security.

"Tomorrow night we take action. Tomorrow night...we get our lives back." Kali said seriously, looking from one to the other.

El barely slept that night, trying to conserve her strength but all she could think about was home.

If she did manage to survive the battle, would her dad take her back? She had watched him many times in the void and he was angry, *very* angry at her for leaving.

El's thoughts wandered to Mike and she felt relieved that he was safely in Massachusetts. He wouldn't have to get wrapped up in all of this drama.

The next day consisted of the group going through their plan A, B, C and D. They all knew there was a high chance they could die that night, but they accepted the risk.

"Need a hand with that?" Hunter was stood by the doorway to the bedroom watching whilst El struggled to put on her armoured vest over her black sweater.

Kali had arrived early that morning with all black clothes and armoured vests that a contact of hers had provided.

"Yes if you wouldn't mind." El sighed in defeat as Hunter gave her a side smile and started to strap the vest onto her.

"Are you scared?" El couldn't help but ask the blonde man.

His blue eyes slowly met her hazel eyes. "Yes...are you?"

"Yes."

They smiled sadly at each other and Hunter carried on with the vest.

The group huddled near the entrance to the lab as Kali looked around cautiously. She nodded to Fifi.

Fifi stepped forward and took a breath, reaching her hands up to the sky.

The sky which had been a navy blue now turned bright from lightening, rolls of thunder erupted the quiet as rain soaked the ground.

Fifi wiped her nose and turned to the others with a satisfied smile. "That should keep the authorities busy." She flung another hand into

the sky and the lightning struck the lab plunging it into darkness.

"Excellent," Kali breathed out with a slight smile. "Let's go."

El focused her attention on the front gates and they sprang open. "What the-" one of the guards asked confused before Sam knocked him and the other guard out.

Sam chucked their guns to Kali and Hunter who thanked him.

El sealed the front gate closed and they rushed forward in the pounding rain to the front doors.

She once again focused on the key card entrance and the doors opened of their own accord.

They rushed into the empty and dark reception, Kali cloaking them with invisibility whilst Emma transformed into Brenner, a sight that all of them found harrowing.

Emma led the way down the corridor, only the emergency lights leading their way.

"Dr Brenner we are trying to get the power back on as soon as possible sir." One of the guards at the next set of sealed doors explained nervously.

"Good." Emma said coldly. The guards immediately opened the sealed doors and everyone moved through except Sam who knocked out both of the guards and took their weapons.

Kali wiped her nose and released their invisibility. "Let's go." She said in fierce voice as they all started to run down the corridor.

They reached the rooms where subjects had been kept, making sure that every room was empty before ploughing forward to the main hub of the building.

El shut her eyes for a moment and she sensed that he was definitely there. She took a deep breath and carried on running with the group.

To conserve El's powers, when they came across a sealed iron door,

Sam stepped forward and kicked it open with relative ease.

They rushed in the room and froze as they saw Brenner stood with about fifty guards in front of him.

"Well, well. My children have come home. *Seize* them."

The guards immediately started to shoot stun like guns at them and the group dispersed quickly to try and avoid them.

Emma was immediately knocked out by the stun, returning to her normal appearance.

El screamed and began throwing guards out of the way, Sam kicked the men and they flew into the air at the lightest of touches, their stun guns having barely no effect on him.

Kali and Hunter began shooting and Fifi started to throw electricity at guards. "How do you like a bit of electricity thrown at *you*! You sons of bitches!" She shrieked.

Brenner laughed at Kali who was clearly trying to use mind control on him despite her rage. "Do you really think you can use mind control on *me* child? I'm your father."

"*No* you are not! My father and my mother are from India. You are *nothing*." Kali roared through gritted teeth.

The others continued to fight as Kali got closer to Brenner. "You killed Seb didn't you." She said her voice shaking from grief.

Brenner smirked, "oh Seven? Why yes I believe I did."

Kali screamed and ran at him, but a guard caught her first, stabbing her in the back. She gasped and fell.

El screamed in rage and immediately broke the guard's neck whilst Hunter rushed forward to heal Kali whilst El made sure to kill any guard that got close to him.

A gun shot narrowly missed El causing shrapnel to cut through her cheeks. She shouted out in pain and took her aggression out on more

soldiers.

Another shot riffled through the air and a scream cried out. El twisted around to see Fifi collapse onto the floor.

"*Hunter!* Hunter Fifi needs you!" El cried out as she desperately tried to keep the guards away from her family.

Hunter raced over to Fifi whilst three soldiers jumped onto El bringing her down to the floor under their wait.

She yelled in fury but was suddenly released when the soldiers stared dumbly at Kali as she walked over, anger seething from her body. "*Do not touch my sister.*"

El jumped up onto her feet and carried on the fight side by side with Kali.

The room was madness, there was screaming, shouting and blood strewn all over the walls.

Hunter had just healed Fifi and was getting back up when another bullet fired, hitting him in the shoulder where the vest didn't cover.

"Fuck!" he shouted out in pain wincing to the floor. El looked at him startled before forcing her attention back onto the soldiers and breaking their necks in revenge.

Hunter stumbled to stand up but carried on the fight regardless. Sam stood next to him as a human shield, flinging bodies against the walls. Bodies that then broke at the force.

Out of the corner of her eye El saw Emma waking up, grabbing a gun from a fallen soldier and shooting as many guards as she could in a blind rage.

The rampage carried on until only a stunned Brenner was left.

In unison the group walked up to him, whilst he backed up against the wall. His eyes for a moment filled with fear. Something El had never seen before in the cold eyes.

Brenner turned to El with wild eyes. "E-Eleven you were always my favourite. *My* little girl. I'm your *papa*."

El felt a fury take over her body as she thought about what this man had stolen from her. He had stolen her life, her mother, her love, her home.

"No." She said in a dangerous voice as they all walked closer to him.

"My father is Jim Hopper."

El flung out her hand in rage and threw Brenner to the floor.

He scrambled up the wall and looked at them all panicked.

Kali closed her eyes for the moment, making them all invisible again to Brenner's mind before Sam grabbed him by the leg and flung him across the room, the cracking sound of both his legs breaking.

The group turned and walked up to Brenner once more, Kali leading the way.

"Before we kill you. I want to know how you killed Seb." Her voice was shaking.

Brenner through his pain, showed a slow smile. "Well it was easy really. He was flying to try and distract us from you all. We followed him in the helicopter until he had exhausted all of his energy...and then we electrocuted him."

Kali gasped in pain, her hand held tighter on the trigger of the gun she held.

"He was still conscious when he was free falling. That's when we set him on fire. Needless to say it finished him off."

The scream of pain that ripped from Kali's chest went through El like a dagger.

Everything happened in the same moment, El started to strangle Brenner with her powers, Fifi started to electrocute him and Kali shrieked with fury as she shot him again and again.

The moment Brenner's body slumped to the floor, the group began to run out of the building, killing any guard still left.

They raced out of the building and then halted as Fifi turned to the lab. She raised both hands up and stared up at the black mass with pure hatred.

"I hope you rot in hell." With her words Fifi made the building explode with merciless flames.

They all watched for a moment, weak, numb and raw.

Kali turned slowly to El, tears in her eyes. "We've done it. We're *free*."

"Ow!" Hunter winced as El forced the bullet out of his shoulder with her powers.

"I'm sorry" she cringed before pushing the cloth back onto the wound.

"As soon as it clots I'll try and force the skin back." El muttered as she looked at the injury.

"It's pretty unfair I can't use my power on myself huh?" Hunter said smiling slightly.

El grinned, "definitely unfair."

They stayed quiet for a while. Fifi was exhausted and knocked out on the bed. Emma, Kali and Sam were drinking whiskey they had found in the cupboard in the kitchen.

El sighed, "right okay...I'm going to try something." Hunter nodded and allowed her to remove the cloth.

She focused all her energy onto the wound and watched as the skin was forced to meet its partner, sealing down the centre.

There was a red and sore scar but the flesh was no longer exposed.

Hunter reached round and felt it. "Well shit..." he said impressed.

El grinned sheepishly and sat down on the edge of the bed next to him.

He turned to her and looked her over, "you look exhausted."

She sighed, "I *feel* exhausted."

"Well why don't you just let me clean you up and you can think about getting some sleep?" Hunter offered.

El nodded and watched as he got a new wet cloth and knelt down in front of her so that they were almost on the same level.

He wiped silently at her face, getting rid of the blood residue and the dust that had plagued her soft skin.

Hunter frowned when he looked at the shrapnel wounds on her cheek. He slowly pressed his hand to her cheek and she instantly felt the warmth of his healing.

"All done..." Hunter whispered, staring into her eyes, his hand not leaving her cheek.

El stared back at him, adrenaline pounding in her veins from their fight, from their *freedom*.

Hunter pressed forward and kissed her lips, causing them both to gasp from the sensation.

They continued to look at each other, heavy breathing from the sudden tension in the room.

Hunter hesitantly dropped his hand and stood up, reaching out for El. "Shall we go see the others?" he asked her, colour rushing to his cheeks.

El nodded awkwardly and walked to the kitchen with him where Kali, Emma and Sam were discussing their plans now they were all free.

She barely listened to them as they talked about leaving for Europe or going to a friend's in New York. All she could think about was the

kiss.

El wasn't sure if she had liked it or not. It was *different*.

"Well we know Jane is going back to Hawkins. What about you Hunter?" Kali asked him as she sipped at her whiskey.

Hunter who was leaning against the door way shrugged slightly. "I don't know. Unlike you I don't have any ID."

El turned to him as an idea came into her head. "You can come back to Hawkins with me if you want. My dad...well he knows someone who got me all my ID. I'm sure he'd help you out too."

Hunter looked at her in surprise and a grin appeared on his face. "Yeah...that'd be amazing thank you."

El smiled at him but averted her eyes, not knowing what had happened between them and if she was making it ten times worse by bringing him to her home town.

5. The Reunion

Happier With You

Author's Note: Thank you to everyone who has reviewed this story so far! Your comments are literally the nicest :-)

This is my last update for today I promise! So I hope you enjoy.

Chapter 5– The Reunion

Summer 1990.

"I think I'm going to puke." El warned Hunter as they walked up to the old Byers now Hopper residence.

He laughed gently, "I'm sure your dad and step mom are going to be really happy to see you Jane."

She turned to him, "I told you, you can call me El."

"I'm used to Jane." Hunter shrugged before giving her hand a squeeze. "You can *do* this."

El faced the house and took a deep breath, clenching her fists in nerves for the rest of the walk.

With a shaking hand, El knocked at the door and stepped back to try and gain some composure.

The door swung open and her dad who had worn a casual expression now looked like his eyes were about to pop out of his skull.

"Hi dad," El said hesitantly, anxiety attacking her throat. See him was incredibly overwhelming.

Hopper stared at her, his mouth open in shock for a long time.

"You...you are grounded until you are 40." He finally said breathlessly before closing the distance between them and bringing her into a bone crunching hug.

El started to cry into his chest and if it was at all possible he held her even closer.

"Where the hell have you been?! It's been *two* years El! Do you think a note was a good enough explanation?!" Her dad's pain and hurt was so evident in his voice that it killed her.

"I'm s-so sorry dad. But we did it...B-Brenner...the lab. It's all gone. We destroyed it."

She felt her dad slowly pull out of the hug and hold her arms with his large hands. "All I currently care about is that my daughter is home."

El smiled sadly and caught her dad look behind her shoulder for the first time during their exchange.

"Who-"

"This is Hunter or Ten. I'm hoping you can help him dad."

Hopper frowned at the blonde young man behind his daughter and slowly nodded his head, beckoning them both inside.

"*Dustin?! Dustin this is Will! I need you to pick up *right* now! This is *incredibly* important! Do you copy?!*"

"Will my friend! What are you up to bud? Looking forward to our reunion tomorrow at Benny's? Over."

"Dustin this is crazy important! I've just come out of my bedroom and El is *here!* Over!"

"Huh...you're breaking up a bit? Can you repeat that? Over."

"El's here at the house! Dustin she's *back!*"

"What...El's...*El's* back?!"

"Yes! And she's not alone...she's got some guy with her"

"Will your signal's going again...did you say she's got a friend?"

"Yeah a boy. But anyway, let Lucas know and then get over here! Over and out."

"Lucas? Lucas do you copy it's Dustin."

"What up brother. Over."

"Lucas you're *not* going to believe this. I have the *biggest* news *ever*. Over."

"Well are you gonna like tell me what it is? Over."

"It's *unreal!* Over."

"Sorry man but Max is here and she's getting really pissed that you're not spilling. So can you like hurry up?"

"Lucas El is *back!* Will just told me. We *need* to go over and see her!"

"*What?!* Oh my god I can't believe this!"

"Me neither. It's been like *two* years!"

"Er...Max is asking if anyone has told Mike..."

"Oh *shit* Mike! And he's gonna be *pissed* too."

"Why would he be pissed?"

"Well Will said she's not alone. She's got a *boyfriend* with her."

"No way that's *mental!* Well we need to let him know then."

"Well I called him this morning and he said he's taking Holly to Benny's as she's missed him. So want me to go over there or you?"

"Nah I'll go. Max is saying she's going to go straight to Will and El's to find out what the hell is going on with this boyfriend situation. I'll speak to Mike. Over and out."

"Which milkshake do you want Hol?" Mike asked his ten year old

sister as he leaned against the order counter.

Holly didn't have to look at the options and he didn't even know why he was asking, because she had the same thing every time.

"Chocolate with extra whipped cream *please*." She said in her sweetest voice.

Mike smirked and nodded before ordering for her and got a chocolate milkshake for himself.

He remembered with a sigh the amount of times he had brought El here. Her favourite had been a strawberry milkshake with extra whipped cream and a cherry.

He thanked the waitress for the drinks and let Holly choose a booth in the corner.

Mike put their drinks down and relaxed in the seat, watching his sister for a minute with a smile. She was the blonde version of Nancy.

"You enjoying the summer Hol?" he asked as he sipped at his drink. She nodded enthusiastically.

"Me, Lily, Georgia and Ben are going swimming tomorrow."

Mike almost spat out his drink. "*Ben?* Whose *Ben?*"

"My boyfriend," Holly said as if this was common news.

Mike gaped at her, "*boyfriend?* Holly you remember you're ten right?"

"So? You started dating El when you were young."

He felt his throat quickly constrict at her words. "That...that was different!"

Holly raised her eyebrow like a mini teenager and drank from her straw, staring at him with what he could only register as pity eyes.

He was seriously getting pity off his 10 year old sister?

Mike sighed, "well as long as he's a gentleman and nice to you...me

and him won't have any problems."

Holly snorted, "like *you* could do anything..." she said rolling her eyes in amusement.

"Excuse me? I could so beat his ass if I wanted to!" He said half joking, half serious.

She grinned at him with humour and carried on drinking from her straw.

Once the conversation had moved away from Holly's love life, they got talking about Nancy, their parents, Holly's room make over and what Mike was planning to do over the summer.

Well that was until Lucas came bursting into the dinner and ran over to Mike in relief and panic.

"Lucas?" Mike asked confused whilst his best friend grabbed his milkshake and gulped it down with thirst whilst Holly looked on equally as bewildered as her brother.

"Urgh that's better..." Lucas panted putting down the empty glass and placed his hands onto the table, gaining his breath.

"Lucas what the hell is going on?"

"I needed to catch you before you...before you found out. You haven't found out right?" Lucas asked him nervously.

Mike looked at Holly and then back at Lucas. "What the *hell* are you talking about?!"

Lucas shifted on his feet suddenly looking incredibly uncomfortable. "The thing is...El...well...she's back."

There was complete silence between the boys as they stared at each other, only broken by Holly exclaiming, "oh yay! I *love* El."

"I-I...I'm sorry but what do you mean she's back? She...she can't be." Mike stumbled out some words. His heart was pounding like there was no tomorrow and his palms began to sweat.

Lucas sighed, "it's true man. She's back home. Will called Dustin and Dustin called me."

Mike blinked and let his mouth fall open like a fish out of water, desperate to say something but his voice was gone.

Lucas rubbed the back of his neck nervously. "Er...and there's something else. I don't know how to tell you this man...but she's got a boyfriend with her."

Mike's eyes widened in horror as he felt all the colour drain out of his face. No, she couldn't have a boyfriend. She was *his*.

"I...I can't do this." Mike said faintly, stumbling as he stood up and got out of the booth.

"Mike?" Holly's sweet little voice asked in concern but her brother had already started to walk away.

"Lucas...Lucas take Holly home." Mike called numbly before running out of Benny's, his whole body quivering as he made off for the woods.

Confused and angry tears sprang from his dark eyes as he ran breathlessly. His limbs feeling weak and heavy, but all he could do was move and keep moving.

El stood under the shower head, closing her eyes as she took in the familiar smells of *home*.

She breathed heavily, hardly able to believe she was back with her family. Back to Hawkins.

El opened her eyes and finished washing her hair as she thought about her dad's and Joyce's reactions to everything she had been up to. Thankfully she was having Hunter explain it all in detail whilst she got showered and changed.

El had been stunned walking into her bedroom. It was exactly as she had left it. Her prom photo still stood proudly on her side table. Her and Mike at their happiest.

She towel dried her hair before walking hesitantly to her closet and being stunned when all her clothes were still there.

Her clothes still in the duffle bag were in desperate need of a clean, but she was happy to find plenty of options still to wear.

El picked out a blue floral summer dress and changed quickly. She brushed her hair in the mirror feeling nostalgia rush over as if she was still under the shower head.

"Where the hell is she?!" Came a very familiar voice from the living room which made El bite her lip in amusement.

"*Maxine* you can't just *walk* into someone's house!" She heard her dad moan but Max clearly wasn't having any of it.

"Oh bull Hopper. I *know* my girl's here and I wanna see her."

El took a breath and went over to the doorway of her room.

Max gasped and looked at her for a moment.

"I honestly don't know whether I want to kill you for leaving or hug you for coming back!" Max shouted.

El smiled slightly and shrugged her dainty shoulders, "I'd prefer a hug to be honest..."

Max grinned and the girls rushed to each other, holding the other in a squeeze.

"Where the actual hell have you been Eleven?!" Max said the moment they broke out of their hug.

El sighed and looked over at her dad and Hunter who were sat at the table together looking through documentation.

"Let's go to my room." She told her favourite female friend. Max nodded and followed her in, making sure to close the door.

The girls sat on the bed and El explained everything about what she had to do, breaking down the wall, the actual fight, the people who

she had to kill. How they had destroyed Brenner.

Max waved her hand impatiently. "That's all well and good. But *who* is that man? Is he your *boyfriend*?"

El hesitated not entirely sure what they were to each other. "His name is Hunter. He's number ten."

Max rolled her eyes, "that's not what I wanted to know. Is there something going on between the two of you? Why have you brought him *here*?"

"I brought him here because he has literally no ID and my dad knows this doctor who helped me out, so I'm sure he can help Hunter too."

Max groaned in frustration. "El you're leaving me hanging here! Come *on*!"

"*Fine*! We...we kissed."

Her best friend gasped. "*What*?! What about Wheeler?!"

El felt a dagger to the heart at the mention of Mike. "It was just *one* kiss after the battle. We were both feeling *crazy* and *free*. But...I shouldn't *have* to feel guilty. Not after what *he* did..." she mumbled looking down at her sheets.

Max frowned, "why what did he do? Last I heard he was heart broken over you."

El gulped and clutch the duvet in her fingers. "I used to visit him in the void. And there was one time I visited. It was the end of school... he was..." Tears started to drop down her cheeks.

"I can't...I can't say it."

Max reached out and grasped El's hands. "You know you can tell me anything."

El looked up at her best friend with sad eyes. "He slept with Jennifer Hayes and I witnessed it in the void."

Max's jaw almost hit the floor. "*What?! When the fuck did this happen?!*"

El sighed, "like I said I think it was the end of school. Maybe a party or something. It wasn't his room."

"Oh my god I bet it was Danny Robertson's party! Wheeler was all depressed so the boys kept filling him up with drink and then we lost him and he said he left. That son of a bitch." Max said shaking her head in disgust.

El's stomach clenched, no matter how upset she was about the whole thing, she hated Mike being insulted.

Max sighed, "look...I am *not* excusing what he did at *all*. But he might not have done it for the reasons you think he did. He was so drunk and *really* depressed over losing you."

"He said he *needed* her." El stated coldly.

Both girls went quiet for the moment, neither of them knowing what to say.

"Well screw him then!" Max said boldly.

El smiled sadly, if only it was that simple.

"So...you and that Hunter kissed. Do you like him?" Max asked carefully.

El bit her lip and looked back up at the red head. "Yeah...I like him but..."

"You don't love him." Max finished for her.

"Look...feel free to hang out here but I want to go for walk and get some fresh air." El suddenly stated jumping off the bed, knowing she couldn't deal with these heavy topics. Not yet anyway.

"Oh okay...sure. I'll go hang out with Will. Dustin and Lucas are coming over too at some point." Max said in a fake cheerful voice.

El only nodded and gave her best friend a smile before leaving the bedroom.

"Where do you think you're going?" She heard her dad's voice the moment she walked to the front door.

"Just out dad...I promise I'll be back." El already knew he was going to moan, so she left the house without having to hear his grunts.

For a while El just walked and walked through the woods, enjoying the sounds of the birds singing and loving the feel of the warm sun rays on her body.

There was an opening in the trees and she noticed with a smile that she had made it to the quarry subconsciously.

El walked down the gravel path that she had first taken at the age of 12 to save her friends. To save Mike.

In fact she almost felt as if she could see him stood near the edge, looking out towards the water.

El's smile immediately faltered and she felt like her heart had just exploded.

No...she wasn't imagining it. Mike Wheeler was stood near the edge of the cliff and looking like a warm summer on the coldest day of winter.

Mike had walked for over an hour, with no obvious destination but just wanting to get away.

How could she be *back*? One moment his semi existence had changed into vibrant colour, only to be ripped once again by the fact she had a *boyfriend*.

How the hell did she even have time to find a boyfriend if she was on the run?

A hollow feeling took over in Mike's chest at the idea that maybe she'd been free for a long time and had just not wanted to come back

to Hawkins...to *him*.

Mike had been on a few dates over the two years but to no real success. No girl would ever and could *never* be El. She was perfection.

He ran his hands through his hair in frustration as he carried on walking, his feet pounding the forest floor until he found himself in front of the quarry.

Mike felt a bitter sweet smile take over his face as he remembered the moment El had saved his life.

As she had walked down that road to him, that was the moment he realised he didn't just like the pretty girl who was kick ass, he *loved* her.

Mike wiped at his tears and walked slowly towards the cliff top. His heart pounding as he looked out at the scenery.

He didn't know how long he stood there, his eyes shut, breathing in the fresh air. But it calmed him. It made him think of a simpler time when it was just him and El against the world.

The world had never been kind to them, but he had felt invincible with her at his side. And it was never to do with her powers, but it was what she did to him. She made him feel so loved, so strong, so wanted.

"I hope you're not going to jump..." came a breathless and soft voice.

Mike's eyes opened in shock, his breath caught in his throat. He didn't dare to turn around. This couldn't be real.

"Even if I did jump, you'd catch me."

"Always."

His body was physically shaking and despite being concerned that this wasn't real, Mike slowly turned around.

And there she was.

Her thick curls blowing slightly in the breeze, he noticed immediately they had grown to just under her shoulders. Her slender body wrapped in a light blue summer dress that clung to her curves, her lips soft pink, her skin glowing in the sunlight and her hazel eyes wide and drawing him in.

Mike couldn't talk, only take in the beauty in front of him. She was mesmerising him. He had no idea if he was breathing, moving, standing or sitting because none of that seemed to matter.

"Y-your hair...it's grown." He choked out, wanting to kick himself for not thinking of something *much* better to say.

El smiled slightly, the smile reaching her eyes which seemed to shine. "Yours too. You...you look taller."

Mike shrugged in response, not knowing how to function properly because he'd heard her voice and it was like heaven.

"H-how long have you been h-home?" He stammered out, desperate to say anything to hear her voice again.

El looked down at her watch, well *his* watch he'd given her when they were 13. "About 3 hours," she said side smiling.

Through all of his confusion Mike found himself smiling too because no matter the hurt or the anger, seeing her was like staring at an angel.

"So...er are you back for good?" Mike couldn't help but ask.

El nodded slowly, still staring into his dark eyes. "Yes."

He watched her, trying to drink her in like she was water in the desert.

She fidgeted with her dress slightly, "em...do you wanna walk me home?" She asked anxiously.

Mike nodded eagerly, "yeah! Yeah that'd be great."

He found that his legs still worked and moved closer to her, the

closer he got his heart was at risk of stopping from how quickly it was beating in his chest.

Mike tried to clear his dry throat as he got closer to El, a stupid instinct to hold her hand came over him, but he quickly swung his arm back to his side just in time.

For his own sake, he quickly put both of his hands safely in his jeans pockets.

"So um...did you go to MIT?" El suddenly asked breaking the silence.

"Yeah I did. I'm starting my second year in two months." He said looking forward but catching a glimpse of her every few seconds through the corner of his eye to make sure he wasn't making her up.

The quiet took over once more as they walked together through the woods, knowing the route between her house and the quarry very well.

As they passed a small clearing Mike wondered if she remembered when they had sex there on impulse at 16. He doubted it.

Mike tried to clear his throat again and licked his dry lips nervously, trying to think of anything to say. But the tension between them was unbearable and he wasn't ready to break the magic just yet.

"So er...Holly's got a boyfriend."

"What? Really?" El gasped at this new information.

Mike found himself grinning slightly, "yeah she's like 10 and has a boyfriend called Ben apparently. She gave me a right teenage scowl because I was being over protective."

El laughed and Mike was positive he almost left his body back on the ground because the sound of it killed him inside. It was so beautiful.

"And let me guess you threatened to beat him up if he wasn't a gentleman?" She asked amused.

It was Mike's turn to laugh in surprise, "yeah that's literally what I

said!"

El scoffed, "as *if* you could beat him up."

"Hey! That's what *she* said! Are you in on some secret with her or something?" he teased. "Anyway, I could so beat his ass!"

El rolled her eyes in amusement and turned to look at him as they walked. "No you're too gentle to beat someone up Mike."

Her words made a heat rise up his neck and onto his cheeks, he tried to desperately ignore it. Silence fell on them once again.

They came out of the woods and the house that El shared with Hopper, Joyce and Will came into focus. Mike immediately hesitated and remembered the last time he had been at this place.

"What *happened* El...where have you been?" he suddenly asked her, turning to her with anxiety ripping through his body.

El looked straight into Mike's eyes and he was taken back with the sorrow he saw there.

"I never expected for it to take that long Mike. Brenner had put up a defence so I couldn't track him. It took almost two years to find the lab location in Texas."

Mike held onto every word coming out of El's mouth like it was oxygen.

"We ambushed the lab. The others, they all have different powers. We used each other's powers to our advantage and got to him. He had like 50 soldiers with him but it didn't matter."

Mike noticed that El's voice had turned darker as she recounted the memory.

"We got through all the soldiers and then there was just *him* left. He tried taunting us...but we destroyed him. All of us together." She said, standing up straight as if she was proud and was expecting him to judge her.

"Good." He said immediately and with anger. "That bastard deserved everything he got."

El's eyes softened as she looked at him. "Mike I-"

They were suddenly interrupted as Hopper and an unknown man came walking out of the house together, deep in conversation until they spotted El and Mike.

"Jane?" the man asked confused and Mike felt his heart completely stop as jealousy ripped through him like fire.

He was the boyfriend. He had short blonde hair, bright blue eyes and was muscular. He looked the complete opposite to Mike in every way and he *hated* every single inch of him.

What killed Mike was that this boyfriend looked strong. He looked like he could look after El and keep her safe, something Mike had never succeeded in.

"I have to go." Mike's voice suddenly broke through the awkward silence between them.

"Mike-"

"No. I have to go. Bye El." He said as calmly as he could, trying with all his might to stop his voice from shaking and to stop the anger from bubbling over onto his face.

Mike turned back to the woods and walked with rage that made his hands tremble and his heart quiver.

He took his pain out on a tree stump which he regretted immediately after the shooting pain in his foot. "For fucks sake!" he shouted into the forest.

He couldn't even kick a damn tree in anger! He was too weak and scrawny unlike El's stupid muscular boyfriend.

Mike scowled and continued his walk home, wanting nothing more than the safety and quiet of his basement where he could try with all his might to put El and that dick head boyfriend out of his mind.

6. The Boyfriend Trials

Happier With You

Author's Note: Thank you, thank you, thank you for the amazing reviews! You guys make me want to get the chapters out even quicker :-)

I hope you enjoy this more relaxed chapter before the angst of the next one! Let me know what you think :-)

Chapter 6 – The Boyfriend Trials

Summer 1990.

El sat on the bottom step of the porch and looked out towards the woods, her mind replaying Mike storming off the day before.

She frowned in frustration. She didn't know why he had left so abruptly but she had wanted to talk to him. She had wanted to discuss their relationship.

"You're up early," came a cheerful voice.

El turned to see Hunter had slipped out the front door and was holding two cups of coffee.

She smiled slightly and thanked him when he handed her one of the cups and sat down next to her on the step.

Hunter had slept on the couch, so El wondered if she had woken him up when she passed through the living room.

"Sorry if I woke you."

"No, it's okay. I couldn't get much sleep anyway. I'm a bit nervous about today."

El smiled at him, "it's going to be fine. Dr Owens is a really nice man and I'm sure dad will do all the talking."

Hunter turned to her, his eyes sweeping across her face until they fell onto her hazel eyes. He swallowed, "can we...can we talk about what happened between us?"

His words came out in almost a whisper but El knew exactly what he was talking about. It was the kiss.

El nodded anxiously. "Yes, I think we need too."

Hunter sighed, "okay well...I know it was spur of the moment and everything, but I kissed you because I like you. I've liked you for a long time."

His eyes didn't leave hers and El felt immediately uncomfortable under the stare. What on earth could she say to *that*?

"Hunter...I'm just really confused right now about my feelings." El admitted looking at him sadly.

He frowned, "you still love him don't you? I could see it written all over your face yesterday."

El bit her lip and averted her eyes. "I *do* love him. But I'm so...I'm so *mad* at him for what he did and equally I honestly don't know if he even feels the same way about me anymore."

There was silence between the pair for the moment as they both pondered their own thoughts and sipped at their coffee.

"Well the only way you're going to know is by asking him Jane. And if he does reciprocate your feelings then I'll back off. But...if he doesn't feel the same way...I want you to know that I really care about you and once I've got my identity I can literally live anywhere. Maybe even here in Hawkins."

Hunter's words resounded through El's body like an echo. He really was so sweet and so caring and she did like him. Perhaps one day it would turn into love. But he just wasn't *Mike*.

God she needed some female advice.

El looked down at her watch and saw it had just gone 7.30am. "I'm

gonna go and get changed. I'll speak to you later okay?"

Hunter nodded silently and watched her stand up and go into the house.

Mike walked into Benny's feeling oddly hungover even though he hadn't drank a sip of alcohol the day before.

He felt sick, clammy and had a banging head ache.

"Hey Mike, over here!" He heard Will shout and he focused on the group in the corner. Next to Will was Dustin and then opposite was Max and Lucas.

They had all been home from college for only a few days and this was meant to have been their big reunion breakfast but after the events of yesterday, Mike hadn't even barely thought about.

"Hey guys," Mike mumbled as he took the seat next to Dustin. He stared in front of him to the spare seat, the seat that had always been taken up by El, El who would usually be stroking his leg with her foot under the table.

"Dude you look like shit." Lucas commented.

Mike scowled, "thanks. That's exactly what I want to hear."

At that moment the waitress wandered over and took all their orders. "Can I get a jug of water as well please?" Mike asked through his dry throat.

Once the waitress had gone, Max who had been staring at him with a glare and crossed arms spoke, "are you hungover or something Wheeler?"

"No Max I'm just...I don't know I don't feel very good."

Dustin patted him on the back sympathetically, "that's what seeing the love of your life in the arms of another does to you bud."

Max rolled her eyes and bit her tongue, Lucas and Dustin gave Mike

looks of compassion and Will just looked damn right confused.

"Who are we talking about here?" Will asked looking at them all.

"El's boyfriend of course!" Dustin said stating the obvious.

"Her stupid, muscular, pretty boy, blonde boyfriend." Mike added coldly, his body raging with jealousy.

"El has a boyfriend?" Will asked in bewilderment.

"Yes! You told me yesterday on the supercom *remember?*" Dustin stated, his voice becoming slightly irritated.

Will huffed, "*no*. I just said she had some guy with her!"

Mike's heart dared to jump with apprehension.

Dustin stared at Will, "but...but you said boyfriend! I swear you did!"

"No I *didn't*! I said some guy and then you asked if I said friend and I said yes and that it was a *boy*." Will shouted exasperatedly.

"Oh." Was all Dustin could say. His cheeks flushing with embarrassment.

"So is he her boyfriend or not?!" Mike asked tensely looking between Dustin and Will like his life depended on their answer.

Dustin shrugged and Will looked guilty. "I honestly don't know man. He's still at our house though. He slept on the couch."

"I know someone who'd know..." Lucas muttered quietly averting his eyes to his girlfriend.

Mike and the rest of the party immediately looked at Max. She was still glaring at him like he was shit on her shoe.

There was silence as they all looked at the red head expectantly. Finally she blew a fuse and shouted, "oh for gods sake you *douche bags*! No! Hunter's not her boyfriend *okay?*!"

Mike felt the biggest grin jump onto his face as a weight fell off his

chest. "So they're not dating?" he asked in relief.

Max rolled her eyes, "*no*. They just kissed."

The grin fell immediately off Mike's face and the weight was suddenly back on his chest, only now it was ten times bigger.

"*What?! I can't believe this!*" he shouted in a jealous rage. He didn't care if he was scrawny, he wanted to rip this Hunter limb by limb.

Max glowered at him, "it's not like *you* can talk Wheeler! You hypocrite."

Mike immediately felt all the air leave his lungs as the colour disappeared from his face.

"W-what...what are you talking about?" He swallowed anxiously.

"Oh I think you know *exactly* what I'm talking about. Does Danny Robertson's party ring a bell?"

Mike completely froze in shock at the fact that Max knew his deepest and darkest secret.

The boys stared avidly between them both.

"What the hell is going on?" Lucas asked confused.

"Yeah, what happened at Danny Robertson's party?!" Dustin added eagerly.

The waitress was back with their food and placed a steaming plate of pancakes in front of Mike, but he felt too nauseous to speak.

He hoped the arrival of the food would draw the attention away from him, but when he slowly glanced up, it was to find them all staring at him, Max shooting him daggers.

"Mike you can tell us." Will said calmly.

Mike gulped and closed his eyes. "I was really, *really* drunk and crying over El on the couch because a stupid song came on and made

me think of her. J-Jen was comforting me." The words were much harder to get out then he had ever feared.

"Jennifer Hayes?" Will asked.

Mike nodded and continued. "I can't remember everything but she asked if I wanted to go somewhere quiet to talk because I was like crying in front of everyone. I don't know *why* we ended up in a bedroom...but we did." His voice laced with guilt.

"Oh." Lucas said solemnly, clearly already coming to his own conclusion.

Mike took a deep breath and looked down at his plate. "We...we ended up having sex."

The silence between the party was unlike anything Mike had ever experienced, but he definitely heard everyone but Max take in a sharp breath at the news.

"Dude..." Dustin said weakly, at a loss for words for once.

Mike hid his face in his hands feeling incredibly ashamed. "It's the worst thing I've ever done. I wish I could take it back." He groaned.

He felt a hand on his shoulder again and could only assume it was Dustin who was sat next to him.

"We all make mistakes Mike." Will said quietly. "We shouldn't have left you alone that night knowing how drunk you were."

"Oh so you're just excusing his actions?" Max scoffed coldly.

"No he's not saying that Max! But...we did all kind of help him get that drunk and we already knew he was in a dark place." Lucas said cautiously.

"And he's not *completely* to blame anyway. There was *two* of them." Dustin reasoned.

Mike slowly put down his hands, completely overwhelmed by the love still pouring from his friends. Their bond still unbroken despite

the worst thing he had ever done.

He hesitantly looked up at Max who was still scolding him with her eyes.

"Look I'm sorry Max. You have *no* idea how sorry I am. Do you think it's what I wanted? I wanted to be enjoying the last year of school with my girlfriend. We had plans...we were going to go to Massachusetts together when I started college."

Mike took a breath trying to ease his emotions. "But she left. She physically held me back from coming with her. I would have dropped everything in a heartbeat for her Max. I *loved* her...I *still* love her."

Max rolled her eyes and sighed, "well then you should be saying this to *her* Wheeler before it's too late."

She checked her watch and then turned to Lucas, kissing him on the cheek. "I've gotta go. I said I'd meet El at 10."

Lucas nodded and Mike's eyes widened. "You're seeing El?!"

Max got up and gave him a pitiful look. "Yes Wheeler, we're going clothes shopping. Anyway, see you losers later."

The boys hesitantly carried on eating their breakfast whilst Mike stared at the door from where Max had just left.

She was right, he needed to talk to El before it was too late. Before her and that man with the annoyingly cool name became a couple.

Mike stood up abruptly, almost panting from how tight his chest felt. "I need to go and talk to El." He said suddenly.

Lucas sighed, "sit down man." He said tiredly.

"Yeah are you really going to confess your undying love in a *clothes* store?" Dustin scoffed before biting into his bacon.

"If I have to tell her I love her in a clothes store then I will!" Mike said defensively.

"Mike just sit down. Let's discuss this first." Will said in his relaxed voice. Mike hesitantly sat back down.

"So what do you want to say to her?" Lucas asked calmly.

"I...want to tell her I love her, that I never stopped loving her and that I want to be with her." Mike said shaking from adrenaline.

Dustin smirked, "are you gonna like bring up the whole Jen Hayes thing?"

Mike glared at him, "do you actually think that would *help* the situation?!"

Will shrugged, "I think you'd never forgive yourself if you weren't completely honest with her." Mike sighed, Will had him there.

"Okay...well I need to tell her that me and her need to talk. I need to tell her about Jen and I need to know if she has any feelings for *Hunter*."

Dustin grinned, "Hunter...what a cool name huh."

"Don't..." Mike warned feeling cranky at the mention of the other man. He thought about Hunter and felt immediately self-conscious.

"He's like really muscular and has that whole pretty boy thing going on. And he's blonde for Christ sake. Do you...do you reckon I should dye my hair blonde or start working out or something?" Mike mumbled to his friends.

There was silence for 3 seconds before Lucas, Dustin and Will burst out laughing.

"Why on earth are you *laughing*?!" Mike asked them incredulously.

"Oh my *god*...Mike the blonde bombshell!" Dustin chuckled as he wiped at his wet eyes.

"Dude you don't need to become a Hunter clone!" Lucas said still amused.

Mike glared at them all in annoyance. "Well if she *kissed* him she must like him."

"You don't know what the circumstances were Mike. But anyway, you don't need to be Hunter. Just be you. She fell in love with you the first time as yourself right?" Will said reasonably.

Mike's face softened slightly as he thought about innocent and beautiful 12 year old El. Her bambi eyes filled with fear the first time he ever saw her in the forest. His undying urge to protect and care for her. Nothing had changed in that regard.

"I just want her back." Mike confessed, his voice a lot more vulnerable than he had expected.

"And you'll get her back!" Lucas smiled with encouragement.

"So let's start planning this then. We can call it...the boyfriend trials!" Dustin said eagerly.

Mike rolled his eyes in amusement as Dustin put on a fake deep movie voice. "The boyfriend trials...staring El Hooper, Mike Wheeler and Hunter...er Hunter?"

"I don't think he has a surname." Will said smiling slightly.

"So what do we do first?" Lucas asked eagerly.

Dustin smirked, "well Max said they were going clothes shopping. Mission number one begins..."

"So Hunter is wanting to be with you and willing to *move* to this shit town if Wheeler doesn't want you?" Max asked amazed as they walked into the air conditioned clothes shop.

"Yep." El said stunned as she looked around at the store she hadn't been in for over two years. It looked exactly the same that it made her smile.

"Wow...no pressure Wheeler." Max muttered under her breath.

"What?" El asked her not quite catching what she'd said.

"Nothing. I just...I think you *need* to talk to Mike."

El sighed, "I will. That's why I wanted to come shopping. I wanna wear something nice when we talk..."

Max scoffed, "you're seriously trying to look pretty for him?!"

El felt her cheeks instantly blush and she distracted herself by looking through a rack of dresses. "N-no...I just wanna look nice!"

Her best friend rolled her eyes and joined her at the rack. "I can't even believe I'm saying this...but you know he'd think you looked beautiful in a sack right? I mean I had to witness him drool over you for 4 years."

She couldn't stop the grin on her face at Max's words, even though she was pretty sure they were a huge exaggeration.

El looked back at Max. "I just wanna look good." She said simply.

The red head shook her head in amazement but humoured El. "So...are we looking for something pretty or something sexy?"

The girls laughed and carried on having a good root through the dresses.

"I can't believe we're seriously doing this!" Mike whispered, feeling sweaty and agitated being this tightly squeezed next to Dustin, Will and Lucas.

The boys had snuck into the clothes store and were hiding behind a rack of coats near the back of the store, spying on El and Max who were currently looking at shoes. Their hands already wrapped around coat hangers with different clothes.

Mike watched El with longing. She looked so beautiful in a white tank top and denim shorts, laughing at whatever joke Max was telling her.

Her sexy toned legs were on display and Mike looked up her body with desire. Damn why was she so hot?!

"What was the plan again?" Lucas asked quietly, moaning from getting leg cramp from their squatted position.

"We see if we can overhear El saying anything about Mike or Hunter. And then Mike casually goes up to El and talks to her." Dustin said simply.

"How do I just *casually* walk up to her? What do I even say!" Mike frowned before being shushed by his friends.

"Geez I don't know! You literally used to suck her face off as a greeting!" Dustin said before taking another peep at the girls.

Mike glared at him, "well I obviously can't do that." He said through gritted teeth.

"You'll think of something okay?! Worst comes to worst talk about the weather..." Dustin whispered distractedly.

Mike popped his head up slowly and saw Max and El were now in the underwear section.

"Holy shit she's picking out sexy lingerie for *Hunter*!" He said in a panicked voice that made his friends shush him once more.

"Calm down, she's looking at *one* bra." Will said in amusement.

They all looked up again just as Max and El started to wander around again. The boys immediately crouched down again.

"Oh shit they're coming right this way!" Lucas said in a panic, looking out between the coats.

"*Crap* we need to move now!" Dustin said pushing all the boys forward.

Everything seemed to happen at once. Dustin pushed Will, who fell into Lucas, who fell into Mike, who tripped into a mannequin bringing it crashing down into the aisle with him attached to it.

"Fuck," Mike said rubbing his shoulder.

"Mike? Are you okay?!" Came the sweetest and most concerned voice that Mike really, really wished hadn't appeared at that moment in time.

Embarrassment flooded Mike's face as he slowly looked up and saw El stood there, her eyes wide in worry whilst Max was stood behind her with the most amused look on her face.

"Er..." Mike said looking around to where the boys had been, to only find they had disappeared. Of course they fucking had.

He hesitantly got himself up and away from the mannequin. "Yeah... I'm fine." Mike said nervously, daring to look into El's amazing eyes and feeling instantly drawn in by them.

He had completely forgotten they weren't alone until he heard Max laugh, "what the *hell* were you doing?!"

Mike's cheeks went even more red as he avoided both of the girls gaze. "I was just...I was...em. It's...it's nice weather today huh?"

He wanted to die right there on the spot.

El looked at him confused, "yeah it's nice weather."

Mike gulped and forced himself to look at her stunning face. "Do you wanna go for a walk?" he asked so quickly he worried she wouldn't catch the sentence and he'd have to repeat himself.

El's eyes widened, "oh...y-yeah. Yeah of course." She turned to Max who reluctantly took the shopping bags out of El's hands.

Nothing happened for a moment except the couple just stared at each other until finally El spoke, "so...should we go then?"

Mike laughed with embarrassment, "yeah sorry. Let's go."

7. Telling the Truth

Happier With You

Authors Note: I hope you enjoy this chapter! Mike's definitely got some grovelling to do! I'm back to university tomorrow, but hopefully I can keep you updated as quickly as possible :-)

Please let me know what you think of this chapter and thank you for your continued support! :-)

Chapter 7 – Telling the Truth

El tried to keep her eyes to herself as she walked through town with Mike. But her body was betraying her.

Every few seconds, she'd find herself side glancing at him and it caused a constant stirring in her chest.

He just looked so *good*. He was taller if that was even possible, she wanted to devour his face which was even more gorgeous with those pouty lips standing out against sharp delicious cheek bones.

His eyes were the same sizzling dark orbs that could swallow her whole and his hair...oh *god* his hair. She so badly wanted to dig her fingers into it.

"So where do you want to go?" El asked Mike nervously, knowing that the inevitable was coming. They needed to air quite a lot out and she knew it wasn't going to be exactly easy.

"Er...wherever you want. But I think we probably want somewhere quiet." Mike mumbled anxiously.

El nodded as she tried to think. It wouldn't exactly be a good idea to go to a dinner or even the park that was now filled with children, just in case her emotions got the better of her and she ended up using her powers.

There was only one place that El could think of that would give them

the privacy they needed.

"Do you have your car with you?" she asked hesitantly.

"Yes..." he said trying to grasp onto her train of thought.

El sighed, "well...what about my dad's old cabin?"

Mike stopped and turned to her, both of them blushing. It was at that cabin where they had lost their virginity to each other way back when they were 16.

"Er yeah...that's a good idea." Mike gulped, nervously clutching his car keys in his jacket pocket.

The couple slowly made their way back to Benny's where Mike explained to El he was parked after breakfast in the dinner with the party.

El smiled slightly, "I saw them all yesterday. It was kind of brief because I was tired, but it was nice."

Well in truth she hadn't been tired, more emotionally exhausted from having seen Mike. Her heart had been left reeling.

"They should have invited you to breakfast." Mike said honestly, turning his eyes onto her.

El shrugged, "I think they thought it might be...awkward."

Mike immediately blushed and averted his eyes. "Yeah...there's nothing awkward about *this*." He teased in the moment making them both laugh slightly.

They went quiet again and El was thankful that they had arrived at Benny's. As she climbed into the passenger seat, she tried not to think about the last time she was in Mike's car.

It was so blissfully easy to be with Mike that El found herself reverting to old habits, like immediately tuning the radio to a station she liked. She was surprised when her favourite station was already the first one playing as soon as she turned it on.

El looked at Mike to see he was staring at her. He smiled nervously, "I never changed it..." he offered as an explanation to the radio.

She nodded slightly, understanding his words and anxiously broke their eye contact, knowing she was falling too deep before they had even discussed their very real issues.

El watched the windscreen and tried to keep her eyes glued there whilst Mike reversed and then drove out of Benny's parking lot.

The drive was mainly silent and El was thankful that it was only a 10 minute drive. In the mean time, they had polite conversation. El asked about Nancy who Mike stated was now living in New York with Jonathan.

Apparently his parents were miraculously still together but fighting a lot, so Mike liked to get Holly out of the house when he was home for college. El felt her heart warm even more at how much of a caring brother he was.

El hesitantly told him about the other subjects and what their powers were, she noticed Mike's grip on the steering wheel tighten slightly when she mentioned Hunter and how he had healed them all when they were injured.

He didn't say anything so El continued to speak, explaining how Kali and Fifi had gone to Europe, Sam was in New York and she had no idea where Emma was.

"And what about Hunter...why...why is he staying at your house?" Mike asked in a casual tone but El could see his tightened jaw.

"He doesn't have any identity so I told him to come to Hawkins with me because I know dad has that contact."

"Doctor Owens?"

"Yeah him. He helped me out with my birth certificate and everything so I'm hoping he'll help Hunter. He went through the lab too, he deserves a normal life." El said calmly looking out the windscreen deep in thought.

"Yeah he does..." Mike said quietly, his knuckles going white on the steering wheel. "And so when he gets his ID...is he leaving?"

El bit her lip not knowing how to answer. She really didn't want to have the conversation of Hunter in the car. "Well maybe. It depends on a few things."

Thankfully at that moment Mike pulled up on the gravel drive and El made no hesitation in getting out of the car.

They walked the 5 minute walk to the cabin in silence, both of them fit to burst from the tension surrounding them like a fog.

Mike watched in awe as El opened the cabin door with a flick of her head. God he had missed seeing her use her powers, he had missed everything, he had missed *her*.

They walked into the disused cabin, where most of the furniture was covered in white cloths, the Hopper's moving out not long after El had turned 16 to move in with Joyce and Will.

"I can't believe how long it's been since I was here." Mike mused looking around at the warm and friendly cabin.

El laughed, "I know. The last time was when you and the party were helping with all the moving boxes and Dustin swore he pulled his back."

Mike laughed too, remembering this certain memory like it was yesterday. "You know he still says his back isn't right to this day."

"Really?" El asked him playfully, her eyes bright and happy and making him feel so incredibly dazed.

"Yeah..." he answered breathlessly, the smile disappearing off his face as he just stared at her intensely.

El's smile also disappeared too and she stared back at him, the tension became unbearable.

She was the first to look away, clearing her throat. "We need to talk

Mike."

Whilst he knew they needed to talk, he couldn't get over how terrified he was about telling her about that night with Jen. He knew he needed to be honest with her, and it would kill him if he wasn't. But he knew it was going to hurt her. *He* was going to hurt her.

El chucked the white sheet off the couch and they both sat down on either end with a very obvious gap in the middle.

"I...I don't even know where to start." El said, her hands in her lap.

"Me either..." Mike said, his leg jittering slightly. He shut his eyes for a moment and took a deep breath. "You said earlier that Hunter leaving depended on a few things...what does it depend on?" He asked, his voice choked from the terror of what her answer could be.

El sighed and turned to him, "Hunter and I kissed after we got back from the lab. He...has feelings for me. He wants to stay in Hawkins if I want to be with him." She said in almost a whisper.

Mike felt the heaviness on his chest crush down on him painfully. He couldn't look her in the eye, he didn't want her to feel guilty at how much pain her words caused him.

Whilst the jealousy in him wanted to ask what the kiss was like, was it a peck or was it passionate making out? He knew there really was only one question he needed to ask.

"And...do you? Do you want to be with him?" His voice was shaking and his palms were sweating.

El was quiet for a moment, looking down at her hands. "No." she said quietly.

"Oh," was the only choked word Mike was able to get out as he looked at El desperately, wanting her so badly that he was physically shaking.

But he knew if she did or didn't reciprocate his feelings, he needed to tell her the truth too.

"El I need to tell you about something...something that happened after you'd gone." His voice was dry and his stomach clenched painfully at what he was about to say.

El looked up at him, her eyes shadowed with something Mike couldn't explain. "Is this about Jennifer Hayes?" she clearly tried to ask calmly but he immediately felt the aching in her words.

Mike's eyes widened and he was frozen in horror that she already knew. "Did...did Max tell you?" he asked incredulously, unable to believe that Max wouldn't let him tell El himself.

El looked confused for a moment but then shook her head, "no...*I* was the one who told Max."

Mike's breath had caught at the realisation of El's words. He had assumed when Max dropped the bombshell that she knew, she had heard it off Jen herself.

"H-how did you know?" he asked in a hushed voice. The sickening feeling in his stomach told him he of course already knew the answer to his question.

El looked at him, breathing heavily. "The void," she said as a tear ran down her cheek.

Mike felt like his heart had just been ripped out. He had never hated himself more. She had *seen* it.

"El I..." he couldn't talk from the trembling and he could barely see through the tears that were rushing down his face.

"I am s-so, s-so *s-sorry*. I n-never meant for it to h-happen." He cried, trying to reach for her hand but she moved it away.

"But it did happen." She said, her eyes cold and hurt.

Mike nodded his head slowly, feeling physically sick from his actions. "It's the worst thing I have *ever* done El. I am not excusing it. I *can't* excuse it. But I was s-so drunk and I was so fucking *h-heartbroken* over you. It had been 353 days and y-you hadn't come b-back to me-"

"So it's *my* fault?" El asked sharply her eyes wild with anger.

"NO! That's not what I meant! El it's not your fault at all. I am so sorry. I just...I thought I had *lost* you. I was so drunk and then that song...that Every Breathe You Take came on, the one we danced to at the Snow Ball. And I just lost it, I was crying and n-nothing made sense without you."

El stood up from the couch and turned to face Mike. "You said you *needed* her." She was no longer glowering with anger but with hurt and it killed every part of him.

Mike stumbled as he stood up, trying to get closer to her, but she started to back away.

"I didn't m-mean it like t-that El I *promise*. I just...I was a wreck and I just wanted to feel *something* other than heart ache. I wanted to feel *normal*...I wanted to feel alive again." Mike sobbed, desperate to hold her, desperate to prove his love.

El said nothing, she was shaking, tears running down her red cheeks.

Mike took another step closer to her. "I regretted it straight away El. It didn't make me feel alive at all. I felt ashamed, dirty, *disgusting*. I *still* feel ashamed, dirty and disgusting."

She sobbed and tried to turn away from him, but Mike reached for her arm and although she fought for it back, she eventually let her tight grip loosen.

"*P-please*. I need you to look me in the eyes El. I need you to believe how s-sorry I am."

"I c-can't." She wept.

"*Please* El." He was frantic, he knew there was a very strong possibility that he could truly lose the love of his life and he couldn't let it happen.

Taking a shuddering breath, El slowly turned to look at him. Her eyes so full of hurt was like physical and mental torture to Mike all at once. But he realised he deserved this torture, *he* had done this to

her.

"I wish *every single second* of the day that it never happened El. I'm *disgusted* with myself. I always swore that I would p-protect you from a-anything. And then *I...was* the one to h-hurt you." He cried, trying desperately not to break his eye contact with her despite the heavy tears.

Mike sobbed as he looked at the love of his life. "I don't deserve y-you. You deserve so much more than me. And if Hunter can *truly* make you h-happy then I won't stand in your way. But...but I n-need you to know that I *love* you. I *never* s-stopped loving you. I have loved you since I was 12 years old. It's *always* been *you*."

El gasped through her tears, "I l-love you too. I *always* have. B-but...I just don't know if I can get over what I s-saw."

He bowed his head in shame for a moment, allowing the pain and hollowness to take over him, closing his eyes as the tears flooded from his eyes.

Mike slowly looked back up and into her hazel eyes. "I always thought the day you left was the worst heart break I had *ever* experienced. It was even worse than the demogorgon because you went willingly-"

Before he could say another word, he felt a sharp pain to his cheek and realised El had slapped him. His eyes widened in shock as he looked at her.

"You think I *wanted* to go willing! How *dare* you!"

El pushed him back and stormed off out of the cabin.

Mike groaned in pain and rushed after her.

"That's not what I meant El!" he shouted, following her as she walked quickly into the woods that surrounded the cabin.

"Well what the hell *did* you mean?!" she screamed back at him, her face dangerously angry.

"I *meant* that I thought I experienced the worst heart break on the day you left. But seeing what I have *done* to you is 100 times worse."

El stopped and turned around to look at him. Her chest was heaving from how sharply she was breathing.

Mike tried to approach her again, but slower and more cautiously. "El I am *so* sorry. I will tell you I'm sorry for the *rest* of my life if you let me. I just need you to believe me. I need you to *forgive* me." His voice cracked on his last words.

He was shuddering from his tears and he couldn't understand how El would ever be able to forgive him. He in turn had broken her heart and it was the most horrific feeling he had ever experienced.

El sighed, as emotionally and physically exhausted as he was. "I just...I need some time to think Mike. *Alone*."

He shut his eyes in despair and nodded silently, accepting her decision. But knowing he couldn't leave it like that.

Mike opened his eyes and stared at El for a moment, seeing her slowly bringing her guard back down.

"That's...that's fine El. I understand. But...I just need you to know how much I *miss* you, how much I *love* you, how *badly* I want to make you happy, how *sorry* I am and how much I *want* to be with you *forever*."

El watched him with caution in her tired eyes. After a while she slowly nodded, as if accepting his words.

"Can you take me home please?" she mumbled out, her voice dry.

"Yes of course," Mike said quickly, wanting to do anything to make her happy even if it meant separation.

El's jaw set tightly and she walked past him towards his car. He followed numbly behind.

The drive to her house was in complete silence, but Mike strangely felt as if some of the tension had gone.

He watched her every few seconds out of the corner of his eye as she lay her head on the passenger seat and stared out of the window deep in thought.

Mike took a breath and tried to keep his eyes on the road.

When they arrived at the house and he pulled up, El immediately unbuckled her seat belt and got out of the car.

He truly felt as if she wasn't going to say anything, but then she hesitantly looked back.

"Thank you for telling me the truth."

Mike felt stunned and the only thing he could think to say was "friends don't lie."

She smiled sadly and Mike felt worse than ever, but as his gaze followed her walk across the grass and enter the house, he knew that there was no way on this earth he was giving her up without a fight.

8. Boys Will Be Boys

Happier With You

Author's Note: Thank you everyone for your amazing reviews and for favouriting and following this story :-) Your words of encouragement are amazing and I love how much people are getting into the story!

I didn't get home until late, but I wanted to try and get this chapter out for you all. It is super long so I apologise in advance! It was originally going to be spilt into two chapters, but it made more sense to me like this, so that I'm ready for chapter 9.

I hope you enjoy! Please let me know what you think :-)

Chapter 8 – Boys Will Be Boys

Summer 1990

El shut the front door firmly and lay her head against the cold wood, getting her breath back from the intensity of her talk with Mike.

She couldn't help but feel more confused than ever. El hadn't realised how truly hurt and upset she had been over Mike having sex with Jennifer Hayes, until her emotions had spilled out.

El knew that Hunter had tried to close the wound for her, but the deep cut had ripped open and her anger had been let loose on Mike.

She had drank at past parties with the group but she couldn't even imagine being drunk enough to do something like *that*.

She wasn't stupid, she knew she had broken Mike the day she left. She had seen it in his eyes, in his sobbing and shaking when Kali had driven them away.

El tried to reason with herself that she and Mike weren't together. She herself had set him free, but she had always hoped and prayed that when she *finally* got back, she'd be back to *him* like nothing had ever happened.

But things had happened. He had slept with someone else and she had kissed Hunter.

El huffed to herself angrily as she walked to her room. Kissing someone else and having sex with someone else was *very* different.

The only problem was that El knew there hadn't been feelings involved with what Mike had done, but there had been feelings involved when Hunter kissed her.

She hated the idea that she was leading him on. He was such a good man and he didn't deserve to sit around waiting for her.

El closed her bedroom door and chucked her duffle bag on the bed, unpacking it properly for the first time.

She carefully took the clothes out and placed them in the laundry basket, each piece of clothing holding a memory.

She reached to the bottom of the bag and slowly pulled out Mike's jacket, the one she had worn when she left him to go with her fellow subjects.

El felt a sharp pain in her chest and she had to sit down, staring at the jacket, holding it tightly in her grasp.

She closed her eyes and within an instance found memories playing in her mind. Memories of Mike wearing the jacket, them laughing as he gave her a piggy back because she had made the stupid mistake of wearing heels to Benny's and her feet were killing her.

The memory of her throwing the jacket off Mike's shoulders in the heat of passion, him giving her the jacket to keep her warm whilst they watched the stars and then finally her putting on the jacket for comfort when she knew she had to leave him and her family behind.

El wearily placed the jacket to the side, it landed onto her pillow as she looked back into the bag.

She sighed to herself as she pulled out the photos and notes that had once lived on her collage board.

El looked at the images with a sad smile, she had looked over these photos more times than she could count whilst on the run. Her fingers brushed delicately over the picture of her and Mike kissing.

She looked down at the notes, reading a few of them. *"I love you so much El Hopper!" "You are looking incredibly gorgeous in that dress babe!" "I can't wait until the day I can call you Mrs Wheeler"*

El groaned in frustration, "damn you Mike Wheeler!" she shouted out. This situation would be a hell of a lot easier if she didn't love him.

"El did you say something?" came a knock and the sound of her step brother Will.

She almost jumped at his voice. "Er...nothing. I didn't realise you were home. Come in." El said before putting the photos and notes under her pillow quickly.

Will walked in and gave her a warm smile.

"I was just unpacking." El explained looking down at the now empty duffle bag.

"Well it's about time, I think mom was itching to unpack those clothes." Will said laughing as he took a seat next to her on the bed.

El smiled slightly but didn't say anything. A comfortable silence fell between them for a minute.

"How are you doing El? I know it couldn't have been easy coming back..." Will asked calmly, giving his sister his full attention.

She shrugged and looked down at the floor, "It's definitely good to be back. I missed you all so much...but it's not been easy."

"Because of Mike?"

El sighed, "well yes. I just feel like...eugh one minute I *hate* him and the next I *love* him!" She collapsed her head into her hands in frustration.

Will rubbed her back sympathetically. "I know what he did El...and

I'm not condoning it...but I know that no one hates him more than he hates himself over it."

El said nothing so Will continued in his calming tone. "I know he's *genuinely* sorry El."

She frowned and took her head out of her hands, looking at Will. "What was he like when I left?" She bit her lip hesitantly, not knowing why she was even asking but desperately wanting the answer.

Will turned quite pale, a similar expression on his face when he told them memories of the upside down.

"I have never seen him so *destroyed*. He wasn't eating, wasn't sleeping, was crying even in front of Max. Thankfully she felt enough sympathy not to comment on it. Hopper blamed him and Max blamed him too. They both thought he above anyone could have gotten you to stay."

El felt a sharp winch of pain at Will's words. "Believe me I never *wanted* to leave him. I never wanted to leave *any* of you. I had no choice. But he wasn't to blame for not being able to stop me Will. I used my powers on him." She said her voice starting to shake as the look on Mike's face that day came swimming back into her mind.

Will smiled sadly, "I know he's not to blame and neither are you. It's just that fucking thing we have to call life."

El looked at her brother in surprise, a small grin on her face. "Will you never swear."

He shrugged side smiling. "there's certain times when only a swear word will do." He said joking making El's heart feel a little lighter.

She exhaled and leaned her head against his shoulder. "What the hell do I do know?"

"Well that's completely up to you sis. Did you talk to Mike earlier?"

"Yeah we talked...well more I shouted and we both cried." El said grimacing at the anger she had felt in the moment. "I told him I

needed some time." She added.

Will nodded, "yeah maybe that's for the best. You don't want to make any rash decisions."

El sighed exhausted, "you really do live up to being Will the wise you know."

Will laughed, "I'm glad to hear it!"

When Mike got home, he headed straight for the basement. Wanting some alone time as he tried to calm down his over active mind.

He lay in the fort he and El had recreated when they were 14. Mike could barely fit into it now, but he just accepted that his legs hung out the over side of it.

He shut his eyes and thought to the many fun, romantic and intimate moments they had in this fort. His memories seemed to taunt him with what he had had and no longer did.

Mike wiped at his tears in frustration. He was so sick of being an emotional wreck, but the idea of losing El completely was just horrific.

He tried to think of how he could make it up to her. Nothing seemed good enough. Mike immediately wished he had his own super power, the ability to turn back time.

He would have never let El go without him and he would never let any other girl near him. How desperately he wished he could erase the memory away from that night, not just for him but for El too.

Mike couldn't imagine what she had felt when she watched them, it made him sick to the stomach. He would have died on the spot seeing El in a similar situation.

He frowned when he thought about Hunter and the possibility of seeing him becoming El's boyfriend. Sure El had said she didn't want to be with him, but feelings changed, she could change her mind.

Mike felt like in a way El and Hunter had more in common. They had both been through the lab together and had 2 years on the run together and battled by each other's side.

And Mike? Well he was just a nerd. A nerd who had found a beautiful girl in the woods and tried to care for her, not realising how quickly that care had become true love. The most powerful emotion he had ever felt in his life.

Sometimes his feelings for her had been so overwhelming he would write her letters and little notes just to express himself.

Mike's eyebrows raised quickly as an idea came to him. He crawled out of the fort and went over to the old D&D table.

He grabbed coloured paper card off one of the overflowing shelves and a pot of coloured pens and pencils.

Mike got to work making a multi-page book for El that he called "*100 Reasons Why I Love You*".

He wasn't the greatest artist but got to work doing little sketches of them, on his bike, in the fort, eating eggos.

He bit his lip in concentration as he started to write the reasons why he loved her.

1. You are the bravest and strongest person I have ever met.
2. The way you walk, talk, smile and laugh makes my heart melt.
3. When I look in your beautiful eyes I fall in love every time.
4. You complete me.
5. You make everyone you speak to feel so special.
6. You are the most caring person in the world.
7. You make me happier than I ever thought I could be.
8. Your Eggo addiction is the cutest thing in the world.

9. You never laugh at me when I get all nervous around you.

10. I love the way you treat our friends.

11. You actually love Star Wars too!

Before Mike could write the next reason, the basement door bounded open making him jump.

He looked over to see Lucas and Dustin walking in unannounced. Mike rolled his eyes, not knowing why he even expected his friends to knock.

"How did mission one go buddy?" Dustin asked immediately as he and Lucas walked over.

Mike tried to hide the book he was making with his elbow.

"If you mean the talk me and El had, then it went pretty bad." He mumbled and sighed in frustration.

"Why bad?" Lucas asked leaning against one of the four chairs around the table.

"Well just bad in the sense that she was understandably very upset and so was I." Mike said quietly, still feeling incredibly guilt ridden.

"Ah so you told her about Jennifer Hayes then?" Dustin said sympathetically.

"She already knew..." Mike muttered painfully.

"What?!" Dustin and Lucas asked in unison.

"Look I don't want to get into it okay? I just want to try and work on getting her back." Mike said seriously.

Lucas eyed the paper, "what's all this?"

Mike's cheeks reddened and he kept his eyes on the table. "Er...I'm just working on something for her."

"100 reasons why I love you. Aw cute!" Dustin said over his shoulder

as Mike failed to shield the card.

Mike glared at his friends, "listen I'm busy okay? I don't have time for whatever this is."

Lucas sighed, "dude we're just trying to help you. Don't you think we all want you back with El too? You two have been nauseatingly in love since we were kids."

"Well she wants some time to think..." Mike said quietly. He hated to imagine her thinking of him and deciding that he wasn't worth it.

"Some time to think whilst Hunter's in the next room?" Dustin scoffed.

Mike glowered with jealousy and frustration. "Do you think I'm *happy* that he's over there! Of course I'm not! And whilst I would rather have my eyeballs taken out then have them be alone together, she doesn't *owe* me anything."

The boys went quiet for the moment, an uncomfortable tension laying in the room which was finally broken by Dustin.

"Hey, I've got an idea for mission two! We invite El *and* Hunter to the lake tomorrow."

Mike turned to look at Dustin like he had just grown two heads. "You really think it'd be a good idea?" he asked incredulously.

"No Dustin might have a good point...if we extended the olive branch to Hunter and you're nice to him and stuff, it'd show that you're the good guy and El should be with you." Lucas said eagerly.

"Plus we could suss Hunter out. See what kind of guy he is, see what El sees in him." Dustin said smiling like this was the best plan in history.

Mike however felt like this was a really bad idea. "You really want me to stand next to him in my swim trunks?"

Lucas rolled his eyes, "Mike's it's not all about *muscles*."

"Yeah you've got that whole dark crazy hair and brooding look thing going on." Dustin said cheerfully.

Mike raised his eyebrow, "gee thanks..." he said not convinced that he had any physical appeal compared to Hunter.

He sighed, "look guys...I'm really not comfortable with this. I don't think it's a good idea."

Dustin sighed and looked at Mike, "do you *really* want him hanging out alone with her whilst we're all out of sight?"

There was only one simple answer to that question, "no."

It was getting on dinner time when Hopper and Hunter arrived back at the house. Joyce was busy cooking some spaghetti and meat balls and El and Will had been hanging out on the couch together watching soap operas.

"How did it go?" El asked immediately. Her hazel eyes went from Hunter to her dad eagerly.

"Sam thinks he'll have my documents sorted in three days." Hunter said positively beaming.

El jumped up from the couch and gave him a hug. "That's amazing! I'm so happy for you!"

Hunter smiled bashfully when she pulled away. "Thank you. Seriously *thank you*."

She blushed with embarrassment but thankfully her dad saved her with one of his sarcastic comments. "Oh and I didn't help *at all* with driving you all the way there and back and getting you in touch with Sam."

Hunter laughed and smiled at Hopper, "thank you. This means so much to me. You have no idea."

Her dad grinned slightly and patted Hunter on the shoulder, "it's okay kid. You deserve a life just as much as El does. What you kids have

been through..."

Hopper shook his head, his features haunted for a moment with the ghost of what he had seen in the labs. The small prison like rooms, no creature comforts and no love.

"Dinner!" Joyce called and they all thankfully went to the table, needing a distraction.

"Want to go for a walk?" El asked Hunter the moment they had finished washing the dishes.

"Yeah sure." He replied smiling at her. His smile made her feel instantly guilty as she knew what she needed to discuss with him.

They walked out towards the woods and El hovered by some of the larger oak trees feeling immediately nervous.

She turned to look at Hunter, he was already watching her.

"I...spoke to Mike this morning." El said carefully.

"Oh?"

She exhaled before speaking, "and he says he still loves me. That... that he wants me back."

Hunter nodded slowly and looked down at the dark ground. "And what do you want?"

El sighed in frustration. What she *wanted* was very different from reality. She *wanted* to have never have been taken away from Mike in the first place. She *wanted* for him to have never slept with Jennifer Hayes.

"I...I want time to process what he told me. I want time to get over my anger. To see if I can move past it." She finally admitted.

El looked up at Hunter and he was staring at her with his piercing blue eyes, his emotions unreadable.

"You mean a lot to me Hunter. We went through hell and back

together. And sometimes it felt like you were my only friend. When even Kali got frustrated that I couldn't bring down the wall, you *never* did. I...I really care about you."

"But?" Hunter asked in a quiet voice, a sad smiling playing on his lips.

El took a shuddering breath, "but I just want us to stay *friends*. We haven't been blessed with many things in our lives Hunter, but your friendship is something I cherish."

She watched him looking solemn and it made her feel terrible. "Please don't be mad at me. I'm sorry." She gasped, feeling more emotional than she had expected.

Hunter sighed and held onto one of her hands, giving it a gentle squeeze. "I'm not *mad* at you. I'm just...annoyed that he gets you and I don't." he said honestly.

"Trust me, Mike isn't getting off easy..." El muttered feeling annoyed as she thought about the stunning beautiful Michael Wheeler.

Hunter smirked, "would it help getting revenge on him? I'm more than happy to oblige."

They both burst out laughing and the awkwardness in the air seemed to lift.

El grinned at him, "you're a great friend...but I'm pretty sure that *wouldn't* help matters."

"It was worth a shot," Hunter teased.

El beamed and linked arms with him and they started walking back to the house.

"So what are your plans once you get your ID?" She asked him with excitement. El was so happy for Hunter, he finally had a world of possibilities.

He seemed to ponder her words for a moment. "Well I think I'll stick with my original plans...I wanna go back to West Virginia. That's my home."

El smiled, "once you're all set up, maybe me and my family can come and visit you?" she asked eagerly.

Hunter nodded with enthusiasm, "yeah that'd be great! I can show you lot the beauty that is West Virginia. Ever heard the song Country Roads?"

El laughed knowing exactly the song he was talking about. They both started singing it into the darkening sky as they made their way into the house.

Will was on the phone and looked shiftily at them when they entered the house.

"Er...yeah she's here." Will tried to whisper but it passed El's ears.

"Who is it?" she asked him curiously.

Will sighed and put the phone to his chest to cover the speaker. "It's Mike El. He wants to know if you've had enough time to think." He said cringing.

El couldn't help but roll her eyes in amusement at his eagerness. "Tell him no."

Will nodded and went back to the phone. "She says *no* Mike. What? Really?! Okay...erm I'll ask."

He turned back to El looking incredibly awkward. "Er...Mike, Dustin and Lucas want to know if you *and* Hunter want to come to the lake tomorrow?"

El feeling surprised turned to Hunter who looked equally as stunned. He shrugged and she turned back to her brother. "Er...I guess that's okay." It would be nice to hang out at the lake with her friends like old times.

Will sighed and put the phone to his ear as if praying there wouldn't be any more questions. "She said yes. Yeah both of them. Okay. Okay, bye Mike."

Mike pulled up by the lake with Dustin, Lucas and Max in tow. As he looked out to see El, Hunter and Will had already arrived, he decided there and then that this was the *worst* idea he had ever agreed to.

He watched on as Max, who had got out the car first, ran to meet El in a hug. Mike took a breath and slowly got out of the car, trying to ignore Lucas and Dustin whispering at him to "be cool" and "be nice".

Mike wanted to be nice to Hunter, he wanted to show El that he was mature, but all he could think about was how close the douche bag was standing to the love of his life.

El looked stunning in a white sundress and he groaned internally seeing the blue tie at the back of her neck meaning she was wearing a bikini underneath. He was *screwed*.

He watched nervously as everyone greeted one another until it was just him left.

Mike tried to muster every bit of strength within himself to plaster a smile on his face and move towards his arch nemesis.

"I don't think we've been formally introduced yet. I'm Mike...and you must be Hunter?"

He tried to keep his voice impassive as he held out his hand.

Hunter looked at him rather shrewdly and shook his hand. "Yeah, I know who you are."

Mike couldn't tell if the words were meant to be intimidating but that was how it felt. He cleared his throat, determined to act cool in front of El.

She was watching the two of them closely and he didn't want to give her any cause for concern.

Mike slowly turned his eyes on her and felt a blush immediately creep up his cheeks. "You look beautiful." He said quietly, hoping no one else would hear.

El bit her lip anxiously, "thank you," she said softly. Mike smiled at

her slightly, scared of grinning too widely in case it freaked her out.

He averted his eyes and was thankful when Dustin said, "well what are we waiting for! Let's get in there!"

Mike had never worried about taking off his t-shirt in front of his friends before, but when Hunter whipped his off, Mike felt immediately self-conscious.

He tried to remind himself that despite his worries about being too thin, El had never particularly minded. In fact she had seemed to like his body, *really* like it.

Mike tried desperately not to think about those times when she was all his and he urged himself to just be brave. He took his t-shirt off and put it on the pile with the others. He tried desperately not to look at Hunter in case he was smirking or something.

Max, Lucas, and Dustin were already running off into the water, all of them shouting and laughing from the sudden temperature change.

"Coming?" Will asked Mike. He looked at his best friend and then dared to look at El who was still in her dress and rooting in Will's car for something. Hunter was hesitantly waiting for her, but eventually decided to get into the water.

"You go ahead, I've just got to do something." Mike said feebly to Will, who rolled his eyes in amusement and made for the water.

Mike nervously reached into his bag for the book he had spent all night making for El. God it was embarrassing.

El popped out from the car with a beach bag and was walking back to the shore when she realised they were alone.

She stopped and stared at Mike, making him want to melt into a puddle under her gaze. She had no idea the power she held over him with just one look.

Mike tried to swallow down the ball of anxiety that was attacking his voice. "Hi," he croaked out.

El looked at him wearily for a moment. "Hi..." she said in response, her voice not giving anything away.

He took a deep breath and walked closer to her, but tried to give her some space. His hand grasped around the book.

"I...er made something for you. But don't open it until you get home okay?" he said nervously.

El seemed curious and her eyes drifted down to the book and then back to his dark eyes. "Okay..."

Mike handed the book over tentatively, hoping she wasn't going to rip it up in his face.

She took it and placed it delicately into her beach bag. When she looked back up, Mike felt the tension begin to build again.

"H-how are you?" he couldn't help but ask.

"I'm fine. You?"

"Er...yeah I'm good." He lied. He wasn't good at all. He was miserable without her. His life didn't make sense, he felt lost and empty.

They continued to look at each other and Mike wondered if she could see the want in his eyes, the yearning he felt for her.

"Will you guys hurry up! We want to play Marco Polo!" Dustin's voice boomed, breaking up their intense eye contact.

"Coming!" Mike shouted feeling highly annoyed at the interruption. He gave El a hesitant smile and then turned to the water, wondering how quickly he could look back at her without seeming like a stalker.

He gave it a good 5 seconds and then turned his head back. His eyes widened immediately as he caught El throw her dress off and over her body.

Mike had no idea how he was still walking because he was completely mesmerised. It had been over 2 years since he had seen her body like this and he felt *starved* of her. A dominant and needy

hunger rushed into his blood and he struggled to wrench his head away from her.

This just wasn't fair. There El was, toned stomach, long lean legs, gorgeous breasts all within a blue bikini looking stunning, beautiful, gorgeous and damn right sexy in her swimwear.

Mike guessed this was part of his punishment. He could look...to a point where he didn't look like a pervert, but he couldn't touch anymore. He breathed a heavy breath, this was going to be torture.

The group played Marco Polo for a good 30 minutes and even Mike would agree that it did help with the awkward tension. They all laughed and splashed each other, enjoying the beaming rays of sun over their water soaked bodies.

Everything was going quite well until Lucas suggested they played chicken.

There were immediate problems of course. In all the years they had played, El had always gone on Mike's shoulders, Max on Lucas's and Will on Dustin's.

But now there was Hunter and the fact that Mike doubted El wouldn't want to come anywhere near him or his shoulders.

His thoughts were proved correct when El said immediately, "I want to go with Max."

"Yeah why not." Max said happily to Lucas's dismay.

"Who am I meant to go with?!"

Max shrugged, "whoever you want. But I'm going with El."

To try and make things a little more comfortable, El went on Max's shoulders and Lucas went on Dustin's shoulders whilst Mike, Hunter and Will watched on.

Mike was only thinking about how he was going to try his best to beat Hunter when something happened that changed everything.

Lucas and El were laughing as they tried to push the other one into the water. Their play fighting became quite intense to the point that Luca's pushing hand slipped and he knocked El hard in the abdomen.

She gasped and fell straight into the water, Mike's eyes widened in horror, knowing something was wrong immediately.

El felt the air be completely knocked out of her before she even hit the water. She couldn't breathe, the sudden force to her abdomen making her diaphragm spasm in revolt.

She crashed into the water and started to sink, unable to breathe properly, her brain rushing into panic mood.

Before she could do more than try and thrash her arms, she felt movement in the water and two firm hands grasp her waist and lift her immediately out of the water until she hit the surface.

She coughed desperate for air, her diaphragm still chocking her breath.

"El! El what's wrong?" Came Mike's terrified voice as El realised immediately that he had of course been the one to save her.

"Get out of the way Mike!" She heard Hunter say aggravated. El could feel Mike be pushed to the side but he somehow still managed to grasp onto her waist as if he was worried she'd go back under.

"I'm so sorry!" She could hear Lucas shouting desperately, but all El could focus on was the fact she couldn't breathe properly.

There seemed to be a struggle between Hunter and Mike, before Hunter's hand reached El's solar plexus. Through her panicked breathing she could feel the warmth of his healing touch.

El slowly felt the pressure in her diaphragm leave and she began to breathe more calmly, getting her breath back and feeling exhausted.

"El are you okay?" Mike asked concerned, his eyes roaming over her desperately trying to make sure she was all in one piece.

Her nod was unregistered when Hunter glowered at Mike, "if you'd moved off her, I could have healed her even quicker. It's not like *you* could do any healing."

"Stop.." El said weakly, trying to get her thoughts together.

Mike suddenly exploded at Hunter, "You don't know *anything* about her!"

"I lived with her for two years!" Hunter scoffed.

"Yeah two years! She's been the love of *my* life for *six* years!" Mike shouted back.

"Stop..." El repeated, getting her senses back as she slowly looked up at the men in front of her in the water.

The boys seemed too infuriated to even notice her protests.

Hunter glared at Mike and smirked, "oh you *really* treated her like the love of your life didn't you. Especially with what you did with that other girl."

The atmosphere immediately changed and before Dustin and Lucas could shout "no!" Mike and Hunter were fighting in the water.

El glowered with rage, she was sick and tired of their ridiculous fight. "Enough!" her voice boomed in a deadly echo across the lake and both Hunter and Mike were immediately blown away from each other.

She stared at them both with anger and disgust, wiping at her bleeding nose before swimming quickly to the shore.

"Nice going *idiots*!" El heard Max call out in irritation, before the sound of the water told her that her best friend was getting out of the water too.

El walked away from the shore with Max at her side, both girls highly annoyed at the boys immature behaviour.

"And that is *why* girls are the superior race. Boys only brain is in their

pants." Max said huffing. "You'd think you were a toy they were fighting over!"

El sighed as they started walking down a path that cut into the forest. "They were being so...*childish*."

"Yep. I guess it was bound to happen though..." Max said shaking her head in exasperation at the situation.

"What do you mean?" El asked frowning.

Max laughed, "oh come on El. They're fighting over you because they both want to be with you!"

El looked confused at her best friend and stopped walking now that they were in the shade and cover of the forest. "But I've told Hunter I just want to be friends."

"Yeah and feelings don't go away just like *that* do they. He was probably feeling bitter towards Mike. And Mike is just...well *Mike*."

El said nothing to Max's words, thinking about the retaliation of the boys.

"So you told Hunter you just want to be friends? What does that mean for you and Wheeler?" Max asked, taking a seat on a broken trunk.

El sighed and sat down next to her best friend, knowing that she couldn't lie to her. "I think I want to get back together with him. But I'm just scared of like...being *intimate*."

Max looked at El in bewilderment. "I don't understand...it's not like you and Mike haven't had sex before. You used to practically bone each other just with your eyes!"

El blushed and looked down at her hands. "That was when all we'd ever experienced was each other." She mumbled.

"Are you seriously trying to tell me you are scared that Jennifer Hayes was *better* than you?!" Max asked in shock.

El couldn't look at her. She knew it was stupid, ridiculously stupid to think that Mike's one time with Jennifer had been anything like her many times with Mike. But she couldn't help but feel insecure about it all.

Max took her silence as an admittance. "Oh El! First of all, he is *ridiculously* head over heels in love with you, just your breathing pleases him, let alone anything *intimate*! And second of all, he was insanely drunk when he did that and so was she from what I've heard, so they were probably as crap as each other."

"I just hate the fact that's she been with him. He's like *mine* you know?" El said cringing slightly at her words.

Max smirked, "I get it. He's like your property in a way and she's tried to move in."

El nodded still cringing. "I don't want to be possessive over him or anything but he kind of belongs to me." She said before erupting into a small smile.

"Well just make sure he knows he's *yours* the next time you are intimate." Max said winking.

El laughed and then threw her head into her hands. "Urgh this is all so frustrating! One minute I hate him and now I'm talking about having sex with him?!"

Max grinned and shrugged, "don't they say there's a thin line between love and hate?"

"A very thin line." El sighed, getting up from the trunk and helping Max up. The girls headed back to the boys.

El was thankful to see that the boys were out of the lake when they returned and distracted by making a fire. Dustin and Lucas were arguing over the best method to making fire with sticks whilst Will and Hunter watched on curiously.

Mike was stood away from the group and was doing his nervous pacing that El knew extremely well. The moment he saw her, his eyes widened and he rushed over.

"I'll take my cue," Max mumbled to El before disappearing.

"El I'm so sorry for what happened before. I know it was *completely* stupid for us to fight and I'm just embarrassed and sorry." Mike said anxiously. His heavy breathing frantic.

El looked at him, taking in how handsome he was. Eurgh why was he so good looking?! She was so attracted to him that it hurt. She just wanted to jump into his arms and wrap her legs right around his waist, kissing him senselessly.

"It's okay Mike." She said calmly, watching him in quiet contemplation, thinking back to how she had been winded before hitting the water.

In that moment she thought about his strong yet delicate hands holding her like his life depended on it as he pulled her up to the surface of the water.

El bit her lip nervously and slowly looked up his face, his dark eyes bringing her in like a magnet. "Thank you for saving me Mike."

He went bright red and averted his eyes, "oh it was nothing. I know you'd do the same for me...or at least I think you would." He said cringing.

She rolled her eyes in amusement. "Of course I would, you mouth breather."

Mike looked up at her, a big smile and hopeful eyes, it made her melt.

"Yes! Son of a bitch I got the fire going!" Dustin said gleefully. El and Mike turned to the group, both of them feeling embarrassed and awkward.

They parted ways quickly, El sitting with Hunter and Max, Mike sitting with Will, Lucas and Dustin. Despite their distance, it didn't stop them from looking over at each other every few minutes. And when they caught each other's gazes they quickly looked away, small smiles playing on their lips.

That night El lay in bed feeling exhausted but oddly whole for the first time in a long time. She reached down to her bag and pulled out the book Mike had made her.

She stared at it in wonder, taking in the love hearts, the drawings, the random eggos drawn here and there. "100 reasons why I love you" she whispered to herself.

El opened the book and started to read, her eyes welling up over certain sentences. A big smile on erupted onto her face, one that she couldn't wipe off if she wanted to.

When she finished reading number 100, El collapsed back onto her pillow and let out a sigh. "Damn you Mike Wheeler." She said playfully, before falling asleep with that same smile on her face, the book clutched to her hands.

9. Caught Up With You

Happier With You

Author's Note: Thank you all so much for the reviews, favourites and follows. It means so much to me and you're all amazing :-)

This chapter is a bit of a sweet relief before chapter 10 which is going to be a tough one I'm not gonna lie! So please enjoy and let me know what you think.

P.S I found this song called Back to You by WILD that I had never heard before and it gave me inspiration for this chapter :-)

Chapter 9 – Caught Up with You

El walked groggily into the living room and spotted Hunter sat at the kitchen table, the newspaper and a coffee next to him.

She gave him a warm smile as she walked bare foot over to the table. "Morning," she said to him yawning before taking a seat.

Hunter looked up and gave her a smile. "Good morning."

El looked at the newspaper curiously, "what are you doing?"

"Oh just looking at some newspapers for job listings in West Virginia." Hunter said before showing her more papers underneath. "Your dad managed to get a hold of all of these for me."

Hunter laughed gently, "you know, I never thought I'd be able to look for a job like a *normal* person."

"We are *normal* people Hunter." El interjected but when her friend gave her an incredulous look, she couldn't help but smile. "Okay maybe we're not."

El watched silently as Hunter circled a few jobs here and there. After a while she headed into the kitchen and put a few eggos into the toaster, loving the smell of them cooking.

"Have you ever thought about what you want to do for a job?" Hunter asked El as she walked back over and sat down with her eggos.

She couldn't help but smile. "Well I always wanted to work in a library. Especially in the children's section. I really like kids."

Hunter grinned, "yeah I can see you being good at that. You've got a lot of patience."

El laughed gently, "thanks. It's what I've thought about doing since I was 14 and I used to babysit Mike's sister Holly. She used to *love* me reading stories to her..."

With a heavy feeling in her heart she thought back to those much more simpler days. Her and Mike had decided that because he wanted to go to MIT and they couldn't bear to be apart, she would get a job in Massachusetts and Mike would get a part time job on the side so they could afford to live alone together.

It was a dream they had shared for years with Mike having got a part time job in Radio Shack to start saving for the dream, for *them*. El couldn't help but wonder what he had done with the money. Had he just spent it all after she left?

"You okay?" Hunter's question brought El out of her daze.

"Yeah sorry...I was just daydreaming." She said embarrassed.

He shrugged, "that's okay. I've been doing a lot of daydreaming too. I just can't wait for a fresh start you know?"

El beamed, "I do know. And in a few days you'll be free of me and my family." She couldn't help but tease.

Hunter laughed, "I didn't mean it like *that*!"

"I know you didn't. But...I will miss you. You're a great friend Hunter." She said earnestly.

He smirked, "are you just saying that because I have healing powers?"

El rolled her eyes amused, "obviously..." she joked making them both

laugh.

The house got a lot busier in the next 30 minutes and El went to take a shower whilst her dad and Joyce left for work and Will went out with Hunter to show him around Hawkins and show him where the clothes shop was seeing as he had so few clothing.

El towel dried her hair, the curls already drying from the warmth of the summer day. She rooted through her new dresses she had bought in the shop, Max having to bring them over the day before because she had left all her bags with her.

She picked a teal dress with a beautiful white and pink floral design. El put white sandals on and wandered around the house, trying to decide what to do with herself.

She sat on the couch and stared at the phone for a good 10 minutes, deciding and then changing her mind about what she wanted to do.

In the end El huffed at herself frustrated and stalked over to the phone. Dialling the number that she knew off by heart.

"Hello Wheeler residence?" Came a sing song voice that El instantly recognised.

"Hi Mrs Wheeler, is Mike there?"

"Yes he's in the kitchen with me now. Who's calling please?"

El bit her lip, unsure as to whether Karen Wheeler knew she was back. "It's El."

She heard Mike's mom gasp. "Oh El! How lovely to hear from you!"

In the background El caught Mike's voice. "It's *El*?! Mom give me the phone!"

"Oh El you have to come to dinner one night sweetheart so we can all catch up." Karen mused.

"Mom seriously give me the *phone*!" El heard Mike urge.

"Let's catch up soon El. I'll just hand you over to Mike."

"Thank you," El said nervously, feeling immediately anxious at the thought of speaking to him.

"Hello? El?" Mike's voice suddenly appeared, breathless and apprehensive.

"Hi Mike..." she said equally just as hesitant, frustrated at herself for getting so flustered with him. But if she liked it or not, he would forever be able to make her heart tremble.

"Hi..." he spoke back nervously.

El sighed to herself, she really just needed to get to the point. "Look I was wondering if you wanted to hang out today...with me."

There was silence on the phone for a moment and El worried if she had been too forward. But Mike had told her he still loved her, surely that meant he wanted to spend time with her?

Mike groaned, "El I want to hang out with you today *more* than you know...but I promised Holly I would take her and her friends to the county fair."

The disappointment in his voice was very obvious and El couldn't help but have the same tone when all she could mutter was "oh..."

"Look...I can cancel okay? *You* are more important."

His words made her heart flutter once again but the look on Holly's dissatisfied face in her mind made her think twice.

"No Mike honestly it's fine, don't worry –"

"Do you want to come with me?! I mean...with us?" Mike interrupted eagerly.

El bit her lip. She had wanted to spend time alone with Mike, to feel herself again and see what was truly happening between them, but she couldn't deny she would love to see Holly.

"You always loved the county fair..." Mike said quietly, hope in his voice.

El couldn't help but smile and think back to the two occasions she had been to the fair with her friends and Mike. The first time she had puked into Dustin's hat that he had been holding whilst they were on the waltzer ride. He swore never to speak to her again, which lasted about 10 minutes after she manipulated a game with her powers and got him to win hundreds of tickets for the gift stall.

And then the second time, she experienced a roller coaster for the first time in her life. Except for when she had levitated, it was the closest she had ever felt to flying. She hadn't been scared with Mike's arm tucked securely around her.

"Yeah why not..." she said daring to grin.

"*Really?*! That's...that's...erm I mean that's great. Well I've got to pick up her friends from 10.30 onwards, so want me to come for you at like 11?" He asked happily. El could practically hear the smile in his voice.

"Yeah 11 is fine." She said softly, trying her hardest to calm down the pounding of her heart beat and the nervous shake in her hands.

"Brilliant! Well I'll see you then El."

"See you soon Mike..."

"Bye El..."

"Bye Mike..."

"Bye El..."

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Why haven't you hung up?"

"Um...sorry. Bye El!" Mike said nervously before finally disconnecting

the phone call, leaving El with a satisfied smile on her face as she breezed over to the couch and tried to distract herself in the land of soap operas.

Mike felt incredibly nervous as he drove to El's house, with three very annoying and high pitched young girls sat in the back of the car gossiping about whether some boy sharing his chips meant true love and whether Lottie Thompson *meant* to wear two shades of pink on the last day of school.

Mike rolled his eyes and kept his focus on the road. "Girls do you promise you're going to *behave* yourselves today?"

The girls giggled, "we promise!" Holly teased.

"As long as you let us go on the roller coaster." Lily said eagerly.

He sighed, "look that's not up to me, it's up to whether you're tall enough Lily."

"That's a no then!" Georgia snorted and the girls laughed all over again making Mike feel on edge. Did he really want to spend a precious day with El around those three gremlins?!

But he didn't have much choice. It was either El on the trip to the fair or no El. And he knew the decision he'd make every time.

"I can't wait to see El!" Holly moaned impatiently.

"What's she like?" Lily asked eagerly.

"She's *super* nice and *really* pretty." Holly said beaming proudly.

Mike pretended he wasn't listening, but really he was hanging onto every word when it came to El.

"How old is she?" Georgia asked avidly.

"19 like Mike. She's super cool and was totally popular in high school." Holly answered looking in between her friends whilst they all sipped from their milkshakes Mike had bought them from Benny's

as a way of a peace treaty that they would behave.

"Didn't she used to babysit you?" Lily asked.

Holly nodded, "yep. She was so nice to me, always let me stay up later than mom would have allowed."

His little sister sighed, "those were the good old days when she was Mike's girlfriend."

"Okay cut it out you lot!" Mike said immediately cringing as his sister's friends gasped at this new piece of information.

"Oh my god you should *totally* get back together with her!" Georgia said eagerly.

"*Totally!*" Lily said nodding her head.

Mike glared at the girls from the rear view mirror. "Look I bought you those milkshakes so you'd behave. So no talking about me and El...okay?"

"Okay!" the girls said in unison before going back to their gossiping.

They finally arrived at the house and before Mike could think about whether or not to get out of the car and knock, El was locking the front door and coming towards the car with a smile on her face.

Mike found his mouth drop open as he looked at how beautiful she looked in her summer dress. Damn he was so attracted to her that he could barely function. He gulped and gripped onto the steering wheel a bit tighter.

"Hi," she breathed as she got in the car and took the passenger seat.

"Hi..." Mike said nervously taking in her appearance and her natural scent which was hitting him in waves of desire.

"El!" Holly squealed from the back.

El turned and gave the girls a big warm smile. "Hey Holly! Hey girls! So who do we have here?"

"This is Lily and this is Georgia. My best friends." Holly said happily pointing out the girls.

"Nice to meet you both. Are you excited for the fair?" El asked them with enthusiasm and as Mike started to drive he felt his heart constantly fluttering at how much her confidence around new people had grown.

"Yes!" the girls answered as if they were one person. They went back to their gossiping about who they thought might be at the fair from their school year, and Mike watched out of the corner of his eye as El turned and faced the front again.

"I...er got you a milkshake too. I didn't know if you fancied one." Mike said quickly, indicating the drink holder with his hand.

El looked down and picked up the milkshake with an odd look on her face. "You remembered?" she asked him bemused.

Mike couldn't help but side smile and shrugged, "strawberry milkshake with extra whipped cream and a cherry. How could I forget?"

He chanced a glance at her and found she was grinning at him playfully, holding the straw close to her lips.

"Thank you." She told him before taking a sip.

Mike's cheeks blushed and he turned back to the road. "It's no problem."

"So I'm confused..." came Georgia's voice from the back seat. "You bought us milkshakes to behave...did you buy one for El to behave too?"

He instantly wished he could pull over and chuck the girls out, driving off with just El. But instead Mike sighed with as much patience as he could muster. "No I didn't buy one so she would *behave*."

El looked highly amused with the conversation and was looking between Mike and the girls.

"Oh so did you buy it so she'd be your girlfriend again?!" Lily asked with interest.

Mike's cheeks went crimson and his eyes widened at the question. Man if it was that easy, he'd have bought her a million milkshakes.

"Girls seriously!" He responded instead feeling highly irritated and embarrassed beyond belief.

"I'm sorry about them...they're a bit hyper." Mike cringed, trying to apologise to El quietly so the girls wouldn't hear.

El shrugged and looked at him. "It's fine...they're cute." *You're cute* Mike instantly wanted to say but held it in with all his might.

"So uh...did you read the book last night?" Mike asked hesitantly, worried he had sounded too needy with his 100 reasons why he loved her.

"Mm hm..." El answered drinking her milkshake. "It was really sweet Mike."

He couldn't stop the bashful smile playing on his lips and he glanced at her again. God he loved her so much. "Well it was true..."

Before El could respond the girls in the back heard the song on the radio and gasped for it to be turned up.

El immediately turned up the volume on Girls Just Wanna Have Fun and Mike groaned loudly, "why are they seriously *still* playing this song!"

"Oh relax! *You* know all the lyrics remember!" El shouted to him over the music and she seemed to laugh at the look of utter mortification on his face.

"Hey! That's because *you* always had it on in my car!" He said teasingly.

El shrugged indifferently, "it's a great song." She said slyly. The girls in the back started to sing along and El joined in, giving Mike a reproachful look. He finally gave in and started to sing too.

By the time they arrived at the fair El's heart was jittery from being so close to Mike in the car and her stomach felt queasy filled to the brim with butterflies.

Mike bought all the tickets including El's despite her protests and as soon as he handed them out, Holly, Georgia and Lily rushed off towards the roller coaster.

"Are they old enough to go out that thing?" El couldn't ask with concern as she and Mike walked slowly behind.

Mike laughed and the sound felt like a bird song in her body. "I don't think the girls care, they just wanna be tall enough to be allowed on the ride." He mused watching them.

El loved the care Mike had for his sister and the kindness of him taking the girls on a fun day out. His caring nature and kindness was one of the many reasons why she had fallen in love with him.

They stood by the rollercoaster and watched the girls patiently. El looked at Mike from the corner of her eye and admired his shorts and t-shirts, even in something so casual he looked ridiculously handsome.

"You look beautiful by the way. I wanted to say before, but those gremlins went crazy over a milkshake, god knows what they would have said to that." Mike said smiling shyly.

El bit her lip and let her eyes slowly looked up Mike's body until she met his dark eyes that stared her down with intensity. "Thank you. You look really good too."

Mike instantly blushed and averted his eyes nervously. "I doubt that!" he laughed.

"Trust me...it's true." El said softly when he finally looked back at her eyes. He smiled slowly and her heart pounded in her chest painfully.

They heard the excited screams of the girls and turned to watch them again as the rollercoaster went to its highest peak before dipping.

"I'm really glad she's having fun..." Mike said staring at the ride and El knew he was talking about Holly.

"I can't imagine what's it's been like for her, at home with just mom and dad. I'm at MIT most of the time and Nancy's in New York." He explained quietly.

El smiled slightly, "well it looks like she's got some great friends to help her through. And a *boyfriend*..." she teased.

Mike laughed and cringed, "god don't remind me about *Ben*."

"I'm just saying...don't underestimate what the power of great friends and an amazing boyfriend can have on someone going through hard times..." Mike immediately looked at her and she knew he had picked up on her not so subtle words.

He turned to her and took her hand delicately in his. "El I- "

But whatever he wanted to say was cut off by the arrival of a very giggly Holly, Georgia and Lily.

"That was awesome! They totally thought we were 13!" Holly laughed, giddy with energy.

"What next?" Georgia said avidly looking at the rides and stalls.

"Ooh lets go on the asteroid ride!" Lily suggested eagerly. The girls all nodded and Mike and El once again followed them, but this time joined in on the ride too.

El couldn't deny that she was having a great time. They all went on a ghost train, walked through the fun house, split funnel cakes and then tried to win prizes at the stalls.

Mike who had already won Holly a teddy bear was determined to win one for El as well. She could see the concentration in his face and she couldn't help but think it was the cutest thing she had ever seen.

Finally his water guns hit the target he was after and the stall worker reluctantly handed over a white fluffy teddy.

"Here you go..." Mike said nervously, a foolish grin on his face as he gave El the teddy.

She hugged it to her chest and grinned at him, "thank you." God she was going crazy for him, she just felt like a child all over again.

"Can we go on the Ferris wheel?" Holly asked them excitedly.

"Yeah of course..." Mike said amused as he and El followed the girls to the ride. Holly, Georgia and Lily got into one of the cars. There would have been room for one more but not two.

El could see the dilemma written on Mike's face but when she touched his arm with her hand and said, "we'll take the next car." She saw his eyes light up and he nodded eagerly.

They climbed into the next car and sat down close but not touching. El looked out at the views as they started to climb. She had never been on the ferris wheel before and found herself feeling a little nervous.

"Hey it's okay..." Mike said, his hand falling on top of hers as he smiled at her kindly. She honestly didn't understand how he could read her mind at times.

El didn't move her hand away and instead looked at Mike, the rest of the ride seemed to blur away and he was the only thing.

"Today has been...so special Mike." She told him truthfully, her words soft and gentle.

He smiled at her devotedly and his eyes looked so warm. "It's been really special to me too El."

El watched as Mike gulped nervously and looked at her pensively. "Have you had a chance to...think about what you want?"

His words were almost a whisper and she could tell his tone was laced with fear at what her answer might be.

El sighed and nodded slowly, "yes I have." She paused and looked at the boy she had fallen in love with at 12. Whilst he was now a man

and had grown significantly over the years, she could still see the same care in his eyes, the same innocent joy and the undying need to protect her.

"I want what we had...I want what we could have now and in the future." She whispered feeling nervous and scared at the prospect of jumping back in the water.

Mike's eyes widened and he stared at her, as if worried she'd just made everything up. "El I am *so* sorry for everything I did. I love you so much, I want to prove it to you for the rest of our lives."

El smiled at him sadly, "I know you're sorry...and I *do* forgive you. I can't forget it...but hopefully over time it will fade. It won't be important." She said quietly.

Mike grasped her hand and their fingers naturally entwined. "The only thing that's important to me El is *you*. I...I just want you to be *happy*. You deserve to be happy more than any one I know. And...I want you to follow your heart, no matter where that takes you." He said seriously, his eyes locked with hers.

Before she could say anything more, the car lurched forward and their ride ended quicker than El would have wanted. She cursed herself for not having paused the ferris wheel with her powers.

They climbed out and met up with the girls. After a few more rides it was starting to get dark and Mike suggested they head back home.

Mike reluctantly dropped El off first as it made sense because of where all the girls houses were situated.

"Walk me to the door?" El asked him after she had leaned over and hugged Holly, Georgia and Lily.

"Sure!" Mike said immediately, feeling nervous and tense the moment she had spoken. He gulped trying to clear his dry throat as he got out of the car.

He rushed over to El's side and they walked slowly up the lawn to the house. Mike desperately wanted to kiss her, hug her or even just

touch her again. He truly wished they had got more time just the two of them.

"El do you wanna go for breakfast tomorrow? Just you and me?" He asked her hesitantly, worried he was giving her too much too soon but El turned to him and smiled as they made it to the porch.

"Yes." She answered, her bright hazel eyes looking at him deeply and making him become immediately drawn to her like a moth to a flame.

"I'll pick you up at like 8?" he offered quietly, barely able to breathe from the stare she was giving him.

El nodded and then took a breath, her stare breaking. "Good night Mike." She said, one hand clutching her teddy and her other hand on the door knob.

"Good night El." He whispered with longing before wrenching himself away from her and walking down the steps, wishing he'd just had the guts to kiss her.

Mike tried to reason with himself that she might have slapped him if he tried to kiss her. He guessed it would be too much.

"Mike?" El's voice called him and just as he turned around, she was there.

El looked at him for one second, not giving him a chance to respond before she cupped his face in her hands, leaned up on her tip toes and kissed him on the lips.

Mike went into immediate shock. His eyes widened with surprise, his heart exploded into a thousand fireworks, his blood boiled in his veins and his stomach swooped.

El pulled away from the innocent kiss and gave him a knowing smile.

"W-what...what..." Mike tried to say but he was completely and utterly dumb founded at how incredibly perfect it had felt to have El's lips on his again.

A big grin appeared on her beautiful face, "I was just following my heart." she answered in reply to his almost choked out sentence.

He could have cried he felt so happy and he wasn't at all surprised when he felt a large lump in his throat, followed by the most stupidest, happiest grin that had ever existed, landing on his lips.

"Good night Mike," El said playfully, her eyes full of mischief before she ran into the house.

Mike had to just stand on the spot for a moment, trying catch his breath. He stumbled to the car like he was drunk and collapsed into the drivers seat.

For a second he had forgotten he wasn't alone until very loud shrieks and whoops almost split his ear drums from the back seat.

"Oh my god, oh my god, oh my god you two *kissed!*" Holly screamed with delight.

"You *totally* bought her a milkshake to make her your girlfriend!" Lily shouted with glee.

"El and Mike sitting in a tree, K-I-S-S-I-N-G!" Georgia sang out.

Mike blushed, "shut up you lot!" But he wasn't angry and he couldn't for the life of him wipe the grin off his face. He was happier than he had been in over 2 years.

10. In The Shadows

Happier With You

Author's Note - Brace yourselves! Things are going to take a turn.

Chapter 10 – In The Shadows

El stirred and turned her alarm clock off, but for once in her life she wasn't annoyed at being awoken from her slumber because she was having breakfast with Mike in an hour.

She turned so she was laying on her back and looked up at the ceiling with a foolish grin on her face. Her stomach was full with vibrant butterflies, she felt nervous and excited when she looked into his dark eyes, her heart was jittering at merely the thought of him and her blood boiled with apprehension. El felt like she was falling in love all over again.

With a dreamy sigh El got out of bed and pondered what to wear. It was only breakfast but she still wanted to look nice.

After years of being in the lab with barely any clothing, El had become obsessed with pretty dresses and skirts in particular. They made her feel feminine, which was something Max had always teased her about.

El decided on a pink skirt and a white tank top, pretty but casual. She brushed her hair and put a bit of mascara and lip gloss on once she had brushed her teeth.

The house was in its usual normal havoc. Joyce and Hopper were both getting ready for work, her dad having lost his hat and Joyce having lost her keys *again*. Will was heading out to meet up with Dustin and Hunter was showering.

El patiently searched for the keys, finding them under a couch cushion. "Thank you sweetie," Joyce sighed in relief giving El a kiss on the cheek. She smiled at her step mom not wanting to remind her

that she lost her keys every day and they were nearly always in the same place.

"Aha!" her dad said as he found his hat under the coats that were hung up. El smiled at him, "all ready for work now dad?" Hopper exhaled, "yeah kid. Now you be good okay? What are you doing again?"

El bit her lip not knowing how her dad was going to take this news. "I'm going for breakfast with Mike...he's picking me up at 8."

Her dad paused what he was doing and looked up at her. "Well it's about damn time...I thought that boy would have been attached to your hip the moment you got home. I was ready with my shot gun."

She didn't know whether to cringe or smile. Her dad didn't know everything that had happened between her and Mike, and she preferred to keep it that way. If her dad knew what Mike had done whilst they were separated, it was highly likely he would have murdered him.

"We were apart two years dad...a lot can happen in that time."

Hopper shrugged and side smiled, "that's true...but the few times I saw him after you left, he was very clearly still love sick over you. The day he stops being in love with you is the day I admit to him that he's actually a good kid and I like him. It's *never* gonna happen."

El laughed gently and hugged him, "I love you dad." She clutched to him, realising how much she had truly missed him over the years they had been separated. His bear paw hands held her protectively. "I love you too kid."

They broke out of the embrace and Hopper cleared his thick throat, averting his eyes but El could see they were misty. "Right well I best get to work kid. See you tonight..."

"See you tonight," El said before hugging Joyce when she left a little while later. Once Will was gone too, El hung out on the couch watching the television and watching the clock every few minutes.

Hunter came out of the bathroom dressed and towel drying his

blonde hair. He looked around to see there was only El in the house and he laughed. "Woah...how long was I in there for?"

El laughed, "only like 15 minutes but the morning is always crazy, everyone rushing to get out quick." She said smiling.

Hunter went to drop the wet towel into the laundry basket when the phone right next to him rang. He looked to El and she nodded to him that it was okay to pick up the phone.

"Hello Hopper residence?"

El watched as Hunter frowned slightly, "*Sam*? Sam it's Hunter. You okay buddy?" he said in surprise. She also felt shocked at the unexpected call from their fellow subject.

El hesitantly stood up from the couch wondering what it was Sam wanted.

"What do you mean she's in *trouble*?" Hunter asked anxiously making El feel extremely nervous.

At that moment there was a gentle knock at the front door and she knew immediately who it was. Feeling distracted by whatever was going on in the phone call, El opened the door and looked at Mike for a brief moment.

He looked incredibly handsome in a fitted short sleeved light blue shirt and cargo shorts. "Hey..." Mike said breathlessly, his eyes lighting up as he took in her appearance. "You ready to go?"

El bit her lip looking back at Hunter who was in deep conversation with Sam and looking troubled, *really* troubled.

She turned back to Mike who was now looking apprehensive from her silence. "Just a bit minute...come in Mike." El said with distraction as she walked back into the house and stood watching Hunter on the phone.

El felt Mike's presence next to her and he looked between her and Hunter. "El what's going on?" She didn't answer him and continued to watch Hunter.

"Indianapolis? Are you *sure* she's there? Right okay...yeah that makes sense. Well...we'll do what we can okay? Yeah of course I will. Speak soon buddy." Hunter put the phone down and turned back to El, his eyes widening for a moment as he realised Mike was stood there too, looking uneasy.

"What's happened?" El asked him immediately.

"It's Emma. She's rang Sam from Indianapolis. Apparently she was laying low in Chicago but felt like she was being followed. She was on her way to us for help...but she's hiding in Indianapolis because she's sure someone's on to her." Hunter said quickly, his eyes turned on Mike a few times and El knew what he was thinking, he didn't think this concerned him.

There was silence before Hunter continued, "Sam would go himself but he's in New York. He wanted to see if you could find her in the void, to see if she is safe enough until we can all get to her."

El nodded numbly. She and Emma had never particularly got on, but she was still part of her family. A family she would protect no matter what.

"Of course I'll look for her." El said with determination. She felt Mike hesitate next to her, she knew what he was thinking. He was worried this was dangerous.

El turned to Mike, "I have to do this." He stared at her for a long moment and then begrudgingly nodded.

Having practised her power over the years, El no longer needed the blind fold or the static noise to help her to locate someone. She sat on the couch, took a breath and closed her eyes. Hunter and Mike were stood in front of her, both of them giving each other uncomfortable glances.

El was immediately whooshed into the void and turned in surprise to see Emma was running before hiding behind a dumpster to catch her breath. She didn't look menacing or threatening at all, in fact she looked terrified. Her green eyes wild and her black hair dishevelled.

Emma took another shaky breath before getting up and continuing to run. Another noise captured El and she turned with a shock to see a man she recognised walking quickly to where Emma had just ran from.

El approached him with shock, she looked at his bald head, his large body and the hard-exterior look he had from years of torturing. It was Ray Carroll.

El opened her eyes with a gasp. Mike immediately dropped to his knees in front of her, his eyes panicked. "What happened? What did you see?"

She exhaled a shaky breath and looked between him and Hunter. "She's...she's running from one of the scientists. He's after her."

Hunter's blue eyes went wide, "w-what do you mean? We got them all...*didn't we?*"

El rubbed a hand over her pale face and shook her head. "There were others...ones who left before Hawkins lab was exposed. Kali would... Kali would *kill* them. I know this man chasing her...his name is Ray Carroll." She said in an unsteady breath.

Mike looked at her with his mouth gaped open as if a memory had stunned him for a moment. "Wasn't he the one..."

"The one Kali asked me to find and kill. And...I couldn't kill him." El said immediately, guilt riddling her as she realised that if she had killed him as planned, he wouldn't be terrorising Emma now.

"Well then we need to help her." Hunter said suddenly, a determined look appearing on his face.

"Yes." El agreed getting up from the couch as Mike hesitantly stood up too. She turned to look at him with a sigh of regret, "Mike you need to go home. I can't have you involved in this."

Mike's eyes bypassed hurt straight to annoyance. "No. El that's bullshit, I'm coming."

"You should listen to her." Hunter said irritated, causing Mike to look

at him, both of them staring at each other with deepest loathing.

"Mike I'm just trying to protect you..." El said trying to reason with him, trying to get him to understand. She couldn't put him in danger.

Mike sighed and looked at her sadly. He reached for both of her hands and held them tightly with his own. "El I *know* you want to protect me...but I want to protect *you* too. I can't bear to think of you leaving again. I...I can't bear to be apart from you again. I'm coming."

El looked at him in conflict. Her heart yearned for him, wanted him by her side whilst she finished off the last of the evil that corrupted her life and the lives of the other subjects. But she wanted him to be safe.

"It wouldn't be safe..." El said sniffing through tears she didn't realise had fallen.

Mike looked at her with love, determination and courage. "I'm not safe *without* you El. I'm not me. I *can't* do another two years. I want to come with you...no matter what that means."

El's thin resolve broke and she found herself nodding. "Okay." She whispered.

"Jane are you sure about this? It's not like he's got any powers to protect anyone." Came Hunter's sceptical voice.

"Why don't you butt out?" Mike said glaring at him.

"Stop it. *Both* of you. We're no use to Emma if we're all fighting. Mike is coming...and you're both going to get along. *Okay?*" She warned them in the most threatening voice she could muster.

Mike relented first. "Fine..." he said sullenly.

Hunter eyed him up and finally sighed, "okay."

Both boys looked at one another and had a very awkward hand shake, broken within seconds but enough to make El breathe a sigh of relief. "Right let's go then." She said with purpose.

Mike immediately insisted on being the one to drive them to Indianapolis. If El or Hunter needed to use their powers they'd be exhausted afterwards, at least he could be their getaway driver.

He took a deep breath as he started the engine, El was sat next to him and Hunter was reluctantly in the back.

Mike felt the adrenaline pump through his body as he sped off, not doing the limit but not too far over it so that they hopefully wouldn't be stopped by anyone.

He quickly glanced over at El, he could see she was going in and out of the void by the small drop of blood at the corner of her nose. She was continuously trying to track Emma.

Mike gulped nervously wondering what they were going to find when they got to Indianapolis. He could barely remember Emma from the day El was taken from him. He was much more preoccupied with the fact his girlfriend was leaving to worry about recognising the subjects.

He could hardly believe El had actually allowed him to come and he made a pact with himself in that moment that he would try and be as useful as he could possibly be.

El came out of the void and started to give Mike some directions. He nodded and took a turn onto the high way.

The journey was mainly in silence whilst El concentrated on finding Emma's location. It took them 20 minutes to get to the city and El quickly told him a location that she was sure Emma was now station at.

Mike nodded and sped up, driving down quieter roads. It was like they were just coming out of the main city when El told him to turn left. He found himself down a dirt track and they came across a large warehouse that looked like it stored crates.

The three of them rushed out of the car and looked around at the vast warehouse and smaller lock ups around it. El honed in on the warehouse, "she's in there. I can feel it." She muttered. Mike followed

behind El as she rushed to the building, Hunter just a little ahead of her.

El focused on the large entrance and it opened with a loud echoing creak, showing an enormous open space which was plunged into darkness. The only light switched on was making a spot light in the centre of the room. Mike gasped as he saw a dark haired woman lying unconscious in the middle.

"Emma!" Hunter cried, immediately running to her in an attempt to heal her Mike could only assume. Something was more than off to Mike, he looked around into the vast darkness and felt his heart pounding.

"Wait guys...I don't think this is –" There was a shot and El and Mike gasped as Hunter slumped to the ground beside Emma.

"Don't worry, it was only a sedative dart...we can't have him healing anyone now can we?" came a deep voice from the darkness.

Mike was now breathing heavily as around 20 men walked out of the shadows, all of them forming a circle which El, Mike, Hunter and Emma were now forced into.

"Any sudden movements from you subject Eleven and we will kill the boy *immediately*." Another voice called.

El looked at them all in a glare, "who...who are you all?"

Another man laughed, "we're the ones who got away. The ones *you* and subject Eight have been trying to track down and kill."

"We heard about what happened in Texas...we couldn't just sit around and let you pick us off." Added another man nervously.

"And then low and behold I see subject Nine in Chicago and I *knew* it meant you would be coming for us." Came the voice of an overweight man who was also holding a gun and sweating.

Mike watched anxiously as El stared him down. "You are Ray Carroll...I should have killed you back then."

"Well we are going to kill you first..." came another deep and angry voice.

Everything happened incredibly quickly in only a matter of seconds. El seeing the men raise the guns, flung her hands out making them scatter. Shouting and the sounds of guns followed.

An immediate feeling to protect El washed over Mike and he rushed to her, his heart screaming to keep her safe. Ray Carroll pointed his gun at El and Mike pushed her to the ground and out of the line of bullets, keeping his body weight over her, desperate to keep her alive no matter what.

El gasped as she was forced to the ground, hearing the sound of a bullet so close that she heard the crunch of it hitting something but she couldn't focus on it. All she could focus on was destroying these men before they destroyed her, Mike, Hunter and Emma.

El freed her hand from under Mike and screamed out, making the men shout out in pain. She could feel Mike moving slowly on top of her but her eyes narrowed and her teeth gritted as she concentrated on squishing the brains of the men, the men who had all been involved in the abduction of children, the men who had tortured them all, the men who refused for them, to be able to lead normal lives.

She could feel the blood rushing down her nose, but with a satisfied snarl El watched as all of the men fell to the floor in unison, blood rushing from their heads.

El gasped, trying to keep conscious and trying to get her breath back. "They're...they're gone." She assured Mike so he would get off her body and allow her to sit up.

Mike very slowly leaned out of his hold of El and she looked over to Emma and Hunter. "How do we wake them up?" she asked exhausted, not sure how long the sedation was for.

When she realised Mike hadn't said a word, El turned to him with a frown. "Mi-

Her eyes widened with the greatest terror she had ever known. Nothing was worse than this moment.

Mike was breathing shallowly, his shaking hands covered in bright blood as he looked down at his abdomen.

El's eyes terrified and wide, slowly looked down to his stomach, the shirt no longer light blue but a deep red, it seeped over the material quicker and quicker. The floor was already covered and El barely realised she too was coated in Mike's blood from the impact of the bullet.

With his face as white as a sheet, Mike tried to reach out to her with his hand but his arm weakened and he collapsed to the floor.

Reality came back to El as quick as if she had been hit by the bullet and she screamed out and rushed to him. She pressed her trembling hands into the wound, trying to stop the bleeding.

"El..." Mike struggled to say weakly, his eyes filled with tears as he looked up at her.

"It's f-fine...it's f-fine. You're g-going to be o-okay." El cried, her voice breaking with every word. She looked up and saw Hunter was still knocked out.

"*HUNTER!* HUNTER! Wake up!" she screamed with all her might, sobbing as she looked back down at Mike.

"He...he can't w-wake up." Mike said trembling from his blood loss.

"*HUNTER! HUNTER! PLEASE!*" El shrieked her heart almost ripping out of her chest in hopelessness.

"El..." Mike struggled to say, coughing as a trail of blood came out of his mouth.

El was howling in panic and in fear. "You're g-going to be okay! You're g-going to be o-okay!" she cried to him, her tears falling rapidly onto his body.

Mike's terrified eyes stared up at her as his shuddering hand reached

for El's face. His fingers barely brushed her cheek as she stared down at him, sobbing out fresh tears.

"I...I l-love y-you..." he said weakly gasping for breath as he looked at her through watering eyes.

El leaned into him, her forehead against his as she wept. "I love you t-too...*p-please* don't leave me."

She felt his breath catch on her cheek and El quickly pulled away to look at him. His eyes had closed, his face was so unbelievably pale and his body had stopped shaking violently.

He was still.

Authors Note - Ah! Please don't hate me! Chapter 11 will be out today I promise!

11. Nothing I Wouldn't Do

Happier With You

Authors Note: And here is chapter 11! I really hope you like it. I wanted it to be special because it's number ELEVEN of course! :-)

Please let me know what you think. Much love :-)

Chapter 11 – Nothing I Wouldn't Do

She felt his breath catch on her cheek and El quickly pulled away to look at him. His eyes had closed, his face was so unbelievably pale and his body had stopped shaking violently.

He was still.

"NO!" El screeched pulling his head into her lap and pressing down on his wound with more force.

"Don't y-you *dare* leave me!" she sobbed at him, trying desperately to bring him around. To do something, *anything*.

El's wild and panicked eyes looked over to Hunter again. "Hunter *please* wake up!" she screamed with fury, knowing it was stupid, knowing he couldn't hear her but she was beyond desperate, she was hysterical.

She began hyperventilating as she pulled Mike closer to her. El looked around the room at the 20 dead men and the greatest fury she had ever known ripped through her like fire. She screamed, the sound reverberating of the walls, a force so strong emitted from her and the bodies of the 20 men immediately obliterated to nothing but ash.

El gasped in exhausted and looked back down at Mike, one of her hands stroking his hair and one hand on his wound. She closed her eyes begging for a miracle, surely it could just be as simple as her love saving him?

What was the point in her powers if she couldn't save her one true love?

El opened her eyes and gasped, there was something she could try. Something she had never thought about or ever attempted.

Keeping Mike cradled into her arms, she looked over at Hunter and tried to focus all of her attention on him, despite her shaking body and utter devastation. She knew this was her only hope.

El kept her stare on Hunter until a feeling washed over him and she was in his mind. The darkness was clouded with a haze, a kind of deep fog that she knew was the heavy sedation.

She reached her hands out, her face full of purpose and pain, her body filled with enough anger and despair to do what she needed to.

El could feel the power leaving her hands as she screamed and the fog started to dissipate, the cloud pushing back further and further until it disappeared.

Hunter's sudden gasp in the background told her it had worked and she slowly opened her tired eyes into the present and watched through blurred vision as Hunter jumped up from the floor.

"Help me...help *him*..." El choked out, her voice so weak and broken as tears of desperation ran down her cheeks.

Hunter's wide eyes took in the scene around him and he ran over to El, kneeling down in front of Mike and staring at his body with terrified eyes.

"El...El he looks..."

"*No!* He's not *dead*. Heal him NOW! *Please!*" she begged him with pain.

Hunter nodded quickly, the colour having left his face as he peeled back the drenched shirt and looked at the wound, gulping slightly.

He exhaled deeply and placed his hands onto the wound, closing his eyes in concentration.

El didn't release her hold on Mike and clutched him like he was the most important thing in the world, because to her he *was*. She stroked his dark locks, "it's going to be okay..." she told him soothingly, kissing his forehead tenderly.

She turned her eyes back on Hunter who was frowning, his eyes still closed. "What's taking so long?" she didn't mean for it to sound as cold as it came out, but she was beyond terrified. She was petrified it was too late and that was something she couldn't allow herself to think of. Because there was no life without Mike in it.

"It's just...it's a lot of healing to do..." Hunter said breathlessly, his face paler, blood now streaming out of his nose.

El watched terrified and drained as the skin on Mike's abdomen finally started to react. The skin stretched, the fresh blood around the wound pooled back into the hole which was getting smaller and smaller.

Her heart trembled with hope she didn't dare allow to be released... not yet. The skin sealed and the scar it caused began to vanish.

Hunter exhausted and weak leaned back on his knees and breathed heavily, wiping at his nose. "That's all I can do El. It's up to him now...he lost a lot of blood before I could get to him." He said faintly.

El moved her free hand onto Mike's cheek and kept her other hand stroking his hair. "Mike?" she whispered, caressing his face delicately.

"Mike can you h-hear me?" she said her voice trembling. Her hand left his face and hesitantly she pressed it over his chest. With relief, she felt his gentle breathing making his body rise and fall softly in synchronisation. El sobbed aloud.

"T-thank you s-so much," she cried to Hunter, looking at him through red and wet eyes. "T-thank you."

Hunter smiled tiredly at her, his own face drained. "He may be an idiot but he doesn't deserve to die. Especially not when you both love each other..." he said weakly.

El cradled Mike closer to her and she moved her hand over his heart.

Hearing his strong heart beat was the sweetest music to her ears.

She looked over at Emma who still hadn't stirred. Hunter followed El's eyes, "don't worry, the second I regain a bit of strength I'll try and get her out of the sedation."

El shook her head. "No, you rest. I think...I think I might be able to do it." She said seriously.

Hunter watched her curiously as she closed her eyes and forced herself into Emma's mind. She was immediately relieved to see that the fog was nowhere near as dense as in Hunter's mind because she had been sedated a while before him.

El reached out her hands feeling a lot more confident this time in her abilities and made the fog roll back until it evened out and vanished.

She opened her eyes and saw that Hunter had already gone over to Emma who was stirring. "What...what happened?" she asked confused and scared.

"It's okay. I'll explain everything, let's just get you up." Hunter told her kindly, offering her his hand.

El focused back on Mike and carefully ran her hand through his hair. She smiled sadly at him, "that was a very brave and very *stupid* thing for you to do. Now do you realise why I didn't want you to come you *mouth breather*."

Mike's still lips slowly turned up in a weak smile and El gasped. "Mike?!" she asked urgently, desperate for him to come round.

His eyes very slowly and wearily opened and he blinked a few times taking her in. "El?" His voice was cracked and tired.

El sobbed out of relief, shaking from happiness and the hope that she hadn't dared to feel. "Don't you *ever* do that to me again!" She cried.

"I'm sorry...I just wanted to protect you." He said weakly.

"And you did..." she sniffled, leaning down and pressing her lips to his softly, only breaking away when she needed to take a shaky

breath. Even in this tense moment, her heart trembled with ecstasy of having the contact with Mike's body.

"I thought I was a goner..." Mike confessed, his voice a little stronger.

El's smile disappeared as the grief of the last 10 minutes dared to crush her. "You were...but Hunter saved you." She told him through a thick voice.

Mike looked at her with surprise in his eyes. "He did?" he asked quietly.

"Yeah I did. You okay?" Hunter's concerned voice carried over as El looked up and saw him walking over with Emma. His arm around her shoulders as he helped her to walk.

"Never better..." Mike said smiling slightly. He turned his eyes to Hunter, "*thank you*. I don't think I'll ever be able to thank you enough for what you did." He said meaning every single word.

El looked at Emma, who was pale and looked just as drained at the rest of them. "How are you feeling?" she asked her.

Emma sniffed away some tears, "better. I was screwed, t-they were all after me. T-thank you for coming. Thank you." She sobbed whilst Hunter rubbed her back sympathetically.

El couldn't help but smile at the fact that Emma seemed to finally be letting down her guard. "We're family...and family stick together."

Emma gave her a watery but warm smile before looking around the room nervously. "Where are they now?"

El shrugged, "I obliterated them." She said not caring how heartless she sounded.

Hunter and Emma both gaped as they looked around the room and for the first time saw numerous piles of dust.

"Damn...you really *don't* mess with Mike." Hunter teased making them all laugh for the first time after the trauma, some of the horrible atmosphere broke slightly.

Hunter smiled and turned to Emma, "come on. I'll take you to the car and then Jane I'll help you with Mike."

El nodded in response and focused back on Mike who was staring at her with a look of admiration. "What?" she asked him curiously.

"I just...I just love you so much and I never want to lose you *ever* again." He told her, his voice trembling with emotion.

She couldn't help but smile brightly at him and she pressed her forehead to his. Staring directly into his eyes and feeling as if she could see right through them to the beautiful soul that she knew lived there.

"You will *never* lose me again."

Mike side smiled, still gazing into her eyes. "Do you promise?"

She sobbed against him, her emotions daring to pull her under once more. "I *promise*."

15 minutes later they were all back in Mike's car. Hunter was driving and Emma was asleep in the passenger seat. She explained she had been followed for three days before she found a phone number for Sam.

She had tried to make her way back to Hunter and El but had ran when she spotted some of the scientists she recognised. Emma was extremely apologetic about what had happened but Mike watched as El assured her it was fine now. That they were all safe and the last of the lab had been destroyed.

Mike was lying in the back seat with his head propped up on El's lap as she played with his hair and stroked his cheek. He watched her with love and fascination. He didn't regret jumping in front of the bullet for her, he would do it time and time again because he loved her more than anything.

A tear slid down her already watery cheeks and Mike frowned. "What's wrong?" he whispered.

El sighed heavily, "I just...I really thought I was going to lose you." She admitted as more tears fell gracefully down her face.

Mike exhaled slowly, feeling a weight on his chest. "And I thought I was going to lose you too. There's *nothing* I wouldn't do for you." He told her gently, meaning every word. He would jump off the edge of the world if she asked him to.

She smiled slowly and reached down to press a kiss on his lips. He closed his eyes and allowed the feeling associated with the kiss to rush over him like a warm medicine.

"So what's the plan again?" Hunter asked from the front seat. Mike felt immediately guilty when he looked at the blonde man. The man he had always hated purely because he liked El. But he was the man who had saved Mike's life to the point where it had drained him. His admiration for Hunter was unprecedented.

"We need to stop at Mike's house. I'll grab him a change of clothes and then we head to the hospital and tell them Mike fainted." El said seriously to Hunter.

Mike had insisted that he was fine but El, Hunter and Emma all agreed he needed to go to the hospital because of his blood loss. He did still feel weak and from what they were telling him, he must have been pale so he didn't argue back too much.

"How are you getting into his house looking like that?" Hunter asked El looking in the rear view mirror at her.

Mike understood the question. El was covered in his blood. It was all over her white tank top and on her hands. She shrugged, "I used to sneak into Mike's room all the time. I know how to get in there from the low roof." She said casually.

El looked down at Mike and gave him a fleeting smile which made his heart swoop as he thought back to the many times she had snuck into his room from the window, and the many things they had done whilst his parents thought he was sound asleep.

Before he knew it they had arrived at his home and El gently laid his

head down on the seat and rushed out of the car.

Whilst they waited, Mike tried to get himself into a sitting position, it took a lot of effort but he made it, trying to ignore the spinning of his head.

"You okay back there?" Hunter asked him, turning in the seat to look at him.

"Yeah...I'm a lot better thanks to you." Mike said honestly giving his former arch nemesis a grateful smile.

Hunter grinned and shrugged, "well it wasn't just me. El did some crazy shit too. I don't know how she managed it, but she took the sedation out of me. That's why I woke up, that's why I managed to heal you."

Mike looked at Hunter in shock for a moment as he pondered his words. He couldn't begin to understand El's powers but to physically be able to take someone out of an unconscious state was beyond incredible.

"Right I'm back," El gasped hopping into the car and giving Mike a weary glare when she realised he was sitting up. "You should be lying down." She warned him with concern.

He smiled lovingly at her, "and I will...once I've got changed." He said calmly.

El begrudgingly nodded and handed him a clean t-shirt and shorts. He realised she had a spare t-shirt and pushed it on, covering up her tank top. Mike couldn't stop the grin on his face from the fact that she was wearing his clothes.

He went to unbutton the shirt with his still shaking hands and he suddenly felt El's fingers over his. Mike looked up at her nervously as she unbuttoned the shirt and moved it off his shoulders, pushing it down his arms until it was off.

Her eyes faltered and she slowly looked up and met his eyes. Mike couldn't be sure, but he could have sworn he saw desire in the hazel eyes. The same desire and want that was mirrored in his eyes.

El looked away embarrassed and picked up a pack of wipes. "I got these out of the bathroom." She explained before pulling some out and getting to work cleaning the blood off Mike's stomach. Something deep and powerful stirred within him as he watched her move the wipes over his skin.

Once El was done cleaning the caked up blood off his body, she helped him pull on his clean t-shirt and awkwardly for both of them, she helped him out of his shorts and pulled a clean set up his legs.

Mike wished he had enough energy to clean the blood off El for her, but instead all he could do was watch her longingly as she cleaned her face, arms and hands with the wipes.

"Right we're here." Hunter said with a sigh of apprehension looking at the modest hospital building.

"Great. Hunter just help me get Mike inside and then you and Emma can go to my dad's cabin if you want? Do you remember where he showed you it was?" El asked tentatively.

Hunter nodded, "yeah I remember. Denfield. It's probably best we do go there otherwise I've got to explain to everyone what happened... and I've got Emma." He said before turning to look at the dark-haired beauty who was sound asleep, completely exhausted.

"Yeah that's fine. I'll ring the cabin later so you can pick me and Mike up." El said calmly, opening the car door.

Mike begrudgingly let El and Hunter help him out of the car, he supported his weight on them both as they made for the accident and emergency room door. He didn't dare to say it, but now that he was stood up he could feel the blood rushing from his head and he felt dizzy and faint.

As soon as they got to the reception desk he knew he must have looked a state because the medical staff gasped and called a nurse who brought a wheelchair over. Mike slumped into it, grateful to be sat down again and off his feet.

"What happened?" The nurse asked El who walked alongside her after

Hunter had left.

"We...we were just out on a walk and he fainted." She said simply averting her eyes.

Once Mike was on a hospital bed, a doctor flashed a torch into his eyes checking his responses. "Do you suffer from anaemia Michael?" He asked seriously.

"Er...no?" Mike answered, hoping they were just going to let him go home.

"Well I'd like to do a blood test to see if you are needing any iron or blood groups." The doctor said looking down at Mike's notes.

Mike nodded in response and lay his head back against the pillow, El was sitting in the chair which she had pulled as close as possible to his bed and she was holding his hand in between both of hers.

When the doctor pulled out the needle, El gasped. "What are you doing?" she asked the doctor swiftly with surprise and anger laced in her voice.

Mike quickly soothed her, "don't worry El it's just going to take some of my blood okay?" He knew she was just as protective over him as he was of her and the only needles she had probably ever seen where ones used on her in the lab.

El's face which was a little paler than usual calmed slightly and she nodded her head in acceptance as the doctor eyed her curiously before taking Mike's blood.

They waited 3 hours before the blood results came back and El listened curiously as the doctor explained to Mike that he needed a blood transfusion, an IV drip for hydration, and would need to spend the night at the hospital.

Once the doctor had left to ring Mike's parents, El turned to him with interest. He was already looking at her with a warm smile, "it's okay. It just means that for the blood I've lost, they are going to give me new blood. And the drip will be to hydrate me with a substance that's

like water." He tried explaining to her and El got the gist.

Once the drips were set up, El watched the blood bag with curiosity for a moment. "Where do they get the blood?" she couldn't help but ask.

Mike smiled at her, "well some really kind people who have a good store of blood go to the hospital and give their blood so others who need it will have some." He said simply.

El looked back at the blood in surprise. "I would like to do that." She said softly.

"It's a really great thing to do...but El I'm not sure if your blood would be like other blood...because of your powers I mean." Mike said honestly and El pondered on this for a moment.

When she didn't speak Mike quickly filled the gap, "well how about when I get better, I'll give blood?"

El smiled at him, "then you can help others like they've helped you." She said calmly as he reached for her hand and gave it a squeeze. "Exactly." He answered.

There was silence between them as El stared at Mike and he stared back at her. Their eyes drawing each other in like a magnetic.

Mike eventually dropped his gaze hesitantly and El could see immediately that he was nervous about something. "What is it?" she asked him quietly.

He took a breath and looked at her anxiously. "It's just...so much has happened El. But I want...well I want to ask if...if you'll give me another chance. Another chance...of being your *boyfriend*." He said quietly, his voice trembling.

Before El could respond Mike carried on rambling. "It's just you're all I want...*forever*. And I promise I won't screw it up this time. I just want *you*, I don't care about college. If...if you want me to leave MIT I will. If you want to come with me to Massachusetts then I want you to...I don't want to *ever* be apart. You're the *one* thing I've *always* wanted."

El watched him with silent warm tears of happiness. She loved his ramblings, she loved how he'd give anything up for her, including his life. She loved how he got so nervous when he declared his feelings like this and she loved *him* more than anything.

She stood up from her chair and leaned over the bed, taking his face in her hands and kissing him delicately. Their lips met and it felt like everything was right with the world again.

El breathed in his scent and felt her whole body go into over drive as his hands moved to her waist. The passion between them was tangible as she moved her mouth with his, they fitted so perfectly together it was like they were made for one another.

Mike let out a deep groan against her lips as she opened his mouth with hers and their tongues met for what felt like a very, very long time. Her body felt hypersensitive as their tongues danced with one another tenderly, as they took in every moment, every hitched breath.

Finally when El thought she might collapse from lack of breathing, she slowly pulled away, not at all surprised to see a very big grin on Mike's face. He looked so dazed and happy that she knew the look was definitely mirrored on her own features.

"So...er...is that a yes?" he asked feebly, still in shock from their moment of passion.

El bit her lip to stop herself from giggling. She stroked down his cheek bones with her fingers slowly and looked into his dark shiny eyes. "Oh that's definitely a yes."

His eyes brightened to a point where she felt like she really could see stars in them. Tears strayed from his beautiful eyes and she wiped them with her fingers as she leaned in and gave him a chaste kiss.

El leaned back slightly, leaving her forehead against his. "We will figure out everything else. But all *I* want is you. Our dream can still be real...*I want* to come to Massachusetts with you." She whispered to him tenderly.

Mike smiled against her, "I still have my savings you know..." he said just as softly.

In surprise El pushed her head back slightly so she could look at him properly. "You *do*?"

He grinned and nodded, "yep. I *never* gave up on the dream El." He told her lovingly but seriously.

El beamed at him, she couldn't believe he had held onto the money that they had always hoped would be the beginning of their new life *together*.

"I love you," El sighed happily, her lips only inches from his.

"I love you too," Mike said smiling against her lips before pulling her in for another kiss, their eyes closing as they fell back into the moment. El's heart felt so full of love, a feeling she hadn't truly experienced for over 2 years. It was a feeling that told her to trust Mike, to love him, to follow him and to be with him always. And El knew she would *always* believe in that feeling.

Authors Note: I hope this made up for chapter 10! And don't worry, it seems like a bit of an ending but I've still got a few chapters to go :-)

12. Putting Things Right

Happier With You

AN: Hi everyone :-) I just wanted to say thank you for sticking with chapter 10. I know it was a difficult one to write, so it was probably a difficult one to read! I hope you all enjoyed chapter 11 and will enjoy chapter 12.

Please let me know by review or private message if you enjoy the story or like what you read. Your feedback is amazing and keeps me going. Thank you! :-)

Chapter 12 – Putting Things Right

The news that Mike was in the hospital didn't stay quiet for very long. Before he knew it, he was being bombarded on by his mom, dad, Holly and the party.

The nurse had insisted on only family and so the party had mumbled that they'd go get a coffee and come back whilst Mike dealt with his very stressed mother.

El had left an hour earlier to go and tell her dad what had happened and make sure Hunter and Emma were okay. Mike immediately missed her but knew she needed to get everything sorted and tie up loose ends.

"And do they know the reason for this unexplained anaemia?" Karen asked with deep concern whilst she brushed the hair out of his face and did all of those mom things that made Mike roll his eyes.

"No mom. That's why it's called *unexplained* anaemia..." Of course he knew the reason but he couldn't really tell his mom he had got shot, almost died, been healed and lost a lot of blood in the process.

"And who got you to the hospital son?" his father asked, sat in a seat and watching his son curiously.

Mike felt a little blush come up his face as he tried to remember his

cover story. "Er...me and El were on a walk and I just felt really faint all of a sudden and collapsed. So she helped to get me here."

"Is El your girlfriend again?" Holly asked with excitement from where she was sat at the end of Mike's hospital bed.

He smirked at her, knowing she was going to be thrilled. "Yeah, she is." he said happily, feeling his heart sing.

As expected Holly squealed with delight causing their mom and dad to both shush her and remind her they were in a hospital.

His mom stopped stroking his hair and instead started to fluff his pillows. There was a warm smile on her face as she spoke. "That's wonderful news sweetie. Will we see her before we leave? I want to invite her for dinner."

Mike rolled his eyes at his mom's eagerness but he had to admire her warmth. She didn't know exactly what had happened between him and El but she had seen him broken. She had heard him crying, refusing to come out of his room, refusing to eat. Mike knew that his mom had always known how happy El made him.

He looked over at the clock and remembered El said she'd try and be no more than 2 hours, which it was now coming close to. "You might do. She should be back in a bit. She er...had to go see her dad." Mike said calmly.

Just then the doctor came in and introduced himself to Mike's parents. He looked down at his notes and gave Mike a polite smile. "Well from your last blood test it looks like your blood groups are looking much better. But we'd still like to keep you over night and give you another blood transfusion."

Mike nodded solemnly, annoyed that he wouldn't be out the hospital. Now he had El back he just wanted to spend every minute with her.

"Do we have any ideas about what has caused all of this doctor?" Karen asked with worry.

"Nothing as of yet. But we'll do a CT scan in the morning to make sure we aren't missing anything." The doctor said looking between

Karen and Ted.

Mike noticed his mom's eyes widen with panic. "CT scan?" she said confused whilst the doctor explained they just wanted to cover all bases.

Mike felt immediately guilty knowing that his mom and even the doctors worried it might be something serious that had caused such low levels of blood, but he knew better. He knew Hunter had healed him but couldn't replace the blood he had lost. This wasn't something he could admit to the doctors or his parents though.

"Mom it's going to be fine. I feel much better after that first blood transfusion." He told her seriously, hoping to at least calm her down. She gave him a fleeting smile and squeezed his hand.

The doctor did his usual 4 hourly checks on Mike and then left the room. Mike sighed getting a bit more comfortable on the bed and looking at his mom who was taking a steady breath and planting a smile on her face.

"Well I hope you're out by tomorrow evening because Nancy is coming from New York with Jonathan to visit and see how you are."

Mike rolled his eyes, "*please* don't tell me they're coming just because I ended up in the hospital."

"Well they weren't going to come for a few weeks but when I told them they wanted to come. She's your sister Michael." His mom said sternly to him and he nodded slightly, knowing he'd do the same for Nancy or Holly.

Mike lay back on the pillows and listened with a smile whilst Holly talked avidly about the things she'd do with Nancy when she was back and her plans of going to the cinema with Ben.

"Ben? Whose Ben?" his father suddenly blurted out from his chair.

Before anyone could respond there was a gentle knock at the semi closed door and Mike felt the biggest grin appear on his face as he saw El standing there. She had changed her clothes to a pair of jeans and a pink tank top and looked incredibly beautiful.

She gave him a shy grin but before Mike could even say come in, Holly had jumped off the bed, "El!" she had shouted before rushing over to her and giving her a hug.

"Hi Holly," El said giving her a squeeze. She closed her eyes when hugging his little sister and Mike couldn't help but get the impression that El look incredibly relieved, like she was with her family again. It melted his heart.

After Holly moved away his mom replaced her, bringing El in for a warm embrace. "Oh El sweetie it's so good to see you." She pulled away just enough to look at his girlfriend and she gasped, "you're even *more* beautiful!"

Mike watched the blush on El's cheeks with love, knowing he must have heart eyes going on right about now. He knew she still got embarrassed and awkward about people complimenting her and her shyness was so cute.

"Thank you. You look beautiful too." El said grinning at Karen who waved her hand in a "*oh stop it*" gesture. "El do you want to come over for dinner tomorrow night? Nancy and Jonathan will be there too." His mom asked eagerly.

Mike wanted to tell her to stop, he hated El being put on the spot. Thankfully his girlfriend had a genuine smile of interest that matched the expression on her eyes and she nodded. "Yes, I would love that."

"Oh wonderful!" His mom said happily before turning back to Mike. "I think we best get going now sweetie, I need to get Holly's dinner. Will you be okay?" she asked him with concern.

Mike turned to El, not taking his eyes off her as he answered. "I will be now..."

Karen knew where his gaze had fallen and she grinned. "Yes I can see you're in very capable hands."

His mom and Holly gave him a hug and a kiss on the cheek, his dad patted him on the shoulder and then walked awkwardly to El and also patted her shoulder. "Nice to see you again Eleanor..." he said

nodding his head is acknowledgement making Mike roll his eyes.

Once his family had left, Mike let out a sigh of relief and reached his hand out for El's. "I missed you..." he said in a needy voice.

El bit her lip, her eyes bright and sincere. "I missed you." She breathed out whilst Mike tugged on her hand and brought her over to him, so that she sat on the bed beside him.

He put his arm around her and felt immediately whole with her pressed up to his side. His heart started hammering in his chest and his skin felt super sensitive knowing she was so close.

El sighed and laid her head on his chest, keeping her fingers entwined with his hand that held the cannula in his arm.

They stayed in silence for a moment and Mike lazily stroked her curly locks with the hand around her shoulder as he shut his eyes and exhaled in contentment. "I could happily fall asleep like this." He admitted.

Mike could practically feel El's grin. "Well don't..." she warned him. "I've got to fill you in on what I've been doing the last two hours."

He opened his eyes with interest and looked down at her form tucked up to his body. "So what have you been doing?"

El sighed, "well to start with I went to the station and told dad. He was *mad*. He said we should have taken him with us..."

Mike shrugged slightly, "I mean, I guess...but we were just in the moment. We didn't think about it."

"So he rang Doctor Owens and they are heading to Indianapolis to clean up..." El said her voice tinged with guilt which confused Mike.

"Clean up?"

"Well yeah...we left ash and a lot of blood behind." El said like it was obvious and Mike immediately felt embarrassed. How could he have even forgot about all of that?! He guessed being shot and then brought back from near death had kind of distracted him.

"Oh...shit."

"Exactly. So dad was really mad but he's already left for Indianapolis and said we'd *talk later*." El said regretfully.

Mike squeezed her shoulder gently, "El don't worry. He won't be that mad at you. Once he's seen what we left behind, he'll see that we didn't have a choice but to go and help Emma."

"I guess..." El mumbled.

He reached over and placed a kiss on her forehead, he saw with a smile that it brought a little grin to her face.

"So how is Emma?"

"She's doing okay, still a bit shaken though. I said to Hunter it might be best for them to stay at the cabin tonight, I just think she wants some privacy. And Joyce..."

"Would be all over her, mothering her." Mike finished for her with a smile.

"Yes. So Hunter's going to stay with her and I'm going to visit them tonight. I took your car...I hope you don't mind. I got them groceries for today and tomorrow. Then I went home, got dressed and came back here." El concluded, nuzzling her head slightly into his chest which shivered from the gesture..

"Well I'm happy you're back..." Mike whispered against her ear. El smiled and turned her head to him, shuffling up the bed slightly so they were eye level with each other.

"Me too..." she mused, looking at his face with an intense sincerity. The look was so powerful that he felt himself immediately drawn into her, his throat going dry and his heart pounding so much he could hear it vibrating all over his body.

Mike placed his hand at the back of her incredible hair and slowly pulled her to him. He closed his eyes and kissed her deeply, relishing every moment. The kiss moved from innocent to passionate very quickly and she ran her hand down his jaw and slowly down his neck

giving him goose bumps.

When her hand planted on top of his erratic heart, Mike opened her mouth with his own and stroked her tongue with his, before it became even more intense, their breathing ragged as they refused to break their kiss.

"Hey Mi- JESUS they're *boning* in the hospital bed!" Dustin voice suddenly boomed making El and Mike jump away from each other, their eyes wild and their breath uneven.

Mike went immediately crimson as he took in Dustin, Lucas, Max and Will all stood by the door, surprise and humour etched on all their faces.

"No we weren't!" Mike said mortified. His friends all sniggered as they came into the room and closed the door behind them. "Yeah *sure*..." Lucas teased making the party all laugh again.

"We *weren't*. El tell them." Mike said turning to his girlfriend with pleading eyes.

El rolled her eyes in amusement, "we were just making out." She told them happily, entwining her fingers with Mike's again.

Their friends faces went suddenly comical, all wide eyes and big grins. "So you're back together then?" Will asked with enthusiasm as he took one of the seats.

"Yes." Mike said with relief as a big proud smile appeared on his face. He looked down at El and gave her a dreamy smile which she returned.

"Oh look heart eyes has returned..." Max smirked pulling out the other chairs and handing one to Lucas.

Dustin plopped himself onto the end of the bed and looked at the couple expectantly. "So how did this happen? Who asked who?" He asked with excitement.

"Jesus Dustin you sound like a girl..." Lucas snorted before catching Max's stare and faltering. "Er...I mean most girls."

"Oh come on, aren't you lot curious?" Dustin said turning to the others who reluctantly smiled and nodded.

Thankfully for Mike, El piped up. "Well it was a combination of a lot of things. We love each other...we always have. And when Mike got shot I realised-"

"Woah woah wait! You got *shot*?! That's why you're in the hospital?!" Lucas gaped.

"Your mum just said you *fainted*!" Will added.

Mike and El looked at each other for a moment, reluctant to have to go through all the details of the day. But they knew their friends weren't going to let this go, so they begrudgingly explained everything. From Emma's phone call, to Mike getting involved, to the 20 last scientists, to Mike getting shot trying to shield El and Hunter healing him.

"Well shit...I guess proving your love for El by jumping in front of a bullet for her pretty much sealed the deal." Dustin said rubbing at his forehead, shaken up from the story.

"Yeah that's what we were going to suggest for mission three." Will teased softly making the boys laugh.

"Mission three?" El and Max both said in unison, confusion written all over their faces.

Mike immediately went red, his eyes wide as he looked at the boys, praying they see that he wanted them to stop talking right now. Dustin didn't seem to get the memo. "Yeah mission three of Mike winning you back. We called it the boyfriend trials!" He said eagerly.

Max crossed her arms and rolled her eyes. "Man you are *such* dorks..."

El snorted. "There were missions? What were they?" She asked with amused interest looking between a very embarrassed Mike and the boys.

When it seemed clear that she wasn't going to get an answer out of her boyfriend, Dustin piped up again. "Well mission one was to get

Mike and you to talk. That didn't go *exactly* to plan seeing as he fell out of the clothes rack rather than strutting over to you as we had planned..."

Everyone laughed except Mike as they all recounted that particular memory. He kept his eyes on the bed, feeling mortified. He really had sucked at every attempt of trying to get El back.

"And what about mission two?" Max asked surprising them all. "*What?* You've got me interested now that it involves humiliating Wheeler..." she teased.

Mike gave her a little glare, knowing that he pretty much deserved her being an ass to him, even when she was joking. He had been a dick to Max when she had joined the group and she never let him forget it. But Mike had gotten used to her humour now and he knew her sarcasm was in good faith.

"Well for mission two Mike was *supposed* to be nice to Hunter and show you that he was the good guy..." Lucas said unable to contain the mischievous grin.

"But that didn't work either as Mike and Hunter ended up fighting in the water." Will said with an amused smile and shake of his head as if he still couldn't believe the petty fight.

Mike huffed, "so what you're all saying is I'm crap."

They all laughed, El included who squeezed his hand. He scowled at her with amusement knowing she was enjoying this.

"Well not exactly Mike...you did pass mission three with flying colours!" Dustin teased with a grin.

Mike scoffed, "I don't remember *almost dying* being a part of the missions!"

Lucas shrugged, "either way. You're alive and you got your girl. Happy?"

His words flowed through Mike making a big soppy grin etch onto his lips. He turned to El, the most beautiful woman in the whole world

who had for some reason accepted him as her boyfriend. "Beyond happy." He said sighing thankfully as he kissed his girlfriend's hand.

"Yeah and you've got *Hunter* to thank for being alive. How does that feel?" Max couldn't help but ask him sarcastically.

Mike rolled his eyes in amusement and shrugged. "Well let's just say I definitely don't hate him anymore. He's...he's a good guy. A *much* better guy than me and I owe him." He said honestly.

Dustin shook his head in shock, "well I never thought I'd see the day..."

El finally left Mike's bed side at the end of visiting hours, having to be practically dragged away from the bed by an entertained Max after she gave Mike eight goodbye kisses.

"Do you want some company going to the cabin?" Max asked El as they walked out of the hospital building with Dustin, Lucas and Will.

"No, it's okay thanks. I want to talk with Emma anyway." She said giving her best friend a smile. Max nodded in acceptance and the girls hugged as they parted ways.

El got into Mike's car, smiling to herself when she thought about the look on his face he'd have when he tried to get in and his legs would be immediately squished from where she had pulled the seat closer to the steering wheel.

She started the car and made her way to the cabin, intent on speaking with Emma preferably alone if she could. El had a lot of questions, and now that the dark-haired girl was warming to her, she wanted to know why she had disliked her so much during their time on the run.

Despite it being her dad's cabin, El still knocked on the door and called out that it was her. Hunter opened the door with a smile, "hey," he said brightly as she walked into the room and saw Emma sat on the couch, with a blanket on her legs. They had been watching television by the looks of things.

"How are you both doing?" El asked as she sat down in the arm chair facing the couch.

"Better," they both said in unison. El smiled in relief and leaned back into the chair, feeling comfortable and tired.

"How is Mike?" Emma asked slowly as if she was still nervous speaking to El for some reason. This was exactly why they needed to speak El thought to herself.

"Oh he's being usual Mike. Inpatient and ready to go home. The doctors are doing tests as they don't understand why he had so little blood reserves...but I don't think they suspect anything." El said calmly looking at them both.

Hunter sat back down on the couch next to Emma. "And your dad? Heard anything more?" he asked nervously.

El cleared her throat and shook her head. "No...I've not been home yet. But if he was back already, I think he would have dragged me home from the hospital." She admitted knowing her dad was beyond pissed at their reckless actions.

"We're *very* lucky to have your dad..." Hunter sighed rubbing at his face. El smiled and exhaled heavily, "we really are lucky. He's the *best* dad I could have ever dreamed of."

They were all silent for a moment, each of them pondering the families they were born into and what they should have had from birth, what they had been ripped away from.

"Well I'm gonna head for a shower before I crash out." Hunter said productively, smacking his hands down on his thighs before standing up.

"There's spare towels in the bags I brought you." El called to him. She watched him nod and smile in response and as soon as he disappeared into the bathroom, El moved to the couch so she was next to Emma.

Emma looked at her hesitantly. "El...I'm sorry for putting this all on you. For what happened...with Mike getting shot."

El frowned, "it's okay Emma. You can't help the fact that they were chasing after you. In a way...I guess it's good that it all happened because we never would have known there was that many of them left. And we wouldn't have been able to kill them all at once."

"You killed them all. I was ridiculous. As soon as I was lured into that room, all I remember is a sharp pain in my neck and then I was out of it." Emma said clearly angry at herself.

El watched the girl for a moment as more of her walls seemed to break down. "My powers...they are so selective. I can't kick ass with them, I can't heal with them, I can't show people what I want them to see in their mind. I can only change my appearance. It's...it's just a short fix and it makes me *mad*." She huffed.

"I'm confused..." El said blatantly and Emma continued. "It makes me mad that they took me from my family for this *ridiculous* power of mine." A tear fell down Emma's cheek and El watched her silently for a moment.

She reached out for Emma's hand and gave it a comforting squeeze. Both girls looked down at their hands. "When did they take you from your family?" El asked quietly.

"They took me when I was 12. My...my mom and dad put up a fight and they...they murdered them." Emma said numbly, her eyes unfocused as if she was recounting everything.

"I remember it like it was yesterday..." she added solemnly. El's heart clenched painfully for her and on instinct she leaned in and hugged Emma tightly. She could hear her sniffing on El's shoulder.

"I'm sorry..." El whispered in support. "They took me at birth so I don't remember anything. My...my mama did though." She said quietly, seeing her mama in her mind, the images she had shown her all those years ago.

"What happened to your mama?" Emma asked in a shaky breath as they pulled out of the hug and looked at each other.

"She...she never gave up trying to find me, to save me. They caught

her when she tried to rescue me and they did something to her with electricity, forcing it into her head." El said heavily, that particular image at the forefront of her mind as tears swam in her eyes.

Emma looked stunned and disgusted. She shook her head and her jaw set. "I hope to *god* we've got justice for them. I hope we have killed each and every one of them." She said through gritted teeth.

El sighed, "I think we have. But if by some miracle we do find out there is more...then we will take them down, the way we always have. *Together*." She said squeezing Emma's hand and getting a rare smile out of her.

"El I am so sorry about how I treated you on the run. I was so mean to you..." Emma said with remorse.

"Why were you mean to me?" El asked curiously, already having forgiven Emma a long time ago for her reactions, but wanting to know where her anger had come from.

Emma exhaled a pained breath. "I was just...*jealous*. You had this amazing power and you were able to do so much and help everyone. I just felt...left out I guess." She said before biting her lip and averting her eyes. "And there...there was another reason too." Emma added sheepishly.

El watched her curiously. "What was the other reason?" she said with interest having accepted the rest of Emma's explanation.

The dark-haired girl seemed very hesitant to answer. Her green eyes went from El to the bathroom door and then back again. "I...I like Hunter." She finally concluded with a heavy sigh.

"*Oh...*" El said smiling as if *finally* everything suddenly made sense about Emma. El knew what jealousy was, she had felt it herself over the news and to an extent felt it with Jennifer Hayes.

Emma immediately blushed. "I've liked him for a long time. Before you even joined us in fact. He was just so different from any guy I'd ever seen. He's so...*pure*. He's so kind and caring and it completely threw me and my emotions." She admitted.

"But he never saw me like that...he only saw *you*. And it kind of hurt." Emma said giving El a bit of an apologetic smile.

El couldn't help but shake her head. "Me and him were close but I only ever wanted to be friends with him. And...he gets that now." She said kindly.

Emma didn't seem so convinced so El continued. "You kind of had this mean...exterior, I think is the word? Which I now understand. But now that you are being yourself Emma, I think he'd really like you." She said reproachfully.

El smiled as she watched Emma bite her lip and go back and forth with what she wanted to do. She deserved happiness and Hunter did too. El hoped there would be reciprocating feelings there.

They were interrupted by Hunter coming out of the bathroom, back in his clothes and towel drying his blonde hair. El couldn't help but smirk at the blush that crept back up Emma's cheeks.

El stood up and cleared her throat, "well I'm sorry it was only a short visit but I best get home to the wrath of my dad." She sighed before looking over at the television. "Hey why don't you two watch a movie or something?" she said with excitement.

Emma gave her a look which she knew meant "*what the hell are you up to?*" Hunter smiled and sat back down on the couch. "Yeah that could be cool..." he said resting into the seat.

"Cool..." Emma repeated, averting her eyes nervously. "Aha! I've got the perfect one." El said picking *Dirty Dancing* out of the video pile she had left here. She loved that film and it had caused many a make out session between her and Mike. Hopefully it'd have the same effect on Emma and Hunter.

El put the video in for a rather bemused Hunter and Emma and then turned to them with a big smile. "Well I best go! Emma fancy meeting me and my best friend Max tomorrow for some shopping?" she asked with enthusiasm.

Emma looked taken back but nodded slowly. "Er...yeah. Yeah that'd

be great."

"Brilliant. I'll pick you up at 10. Well I'll see you both soon then. Bye." El said giving them both a wave.

"Bye El!" Hunter called.

"Bye. Thanks El." Emma said before El gave her a knowing smile and left.

El grinned to herself as she drove home, maybe she could give Dustin a run for his money and try her own matchmaking operation.

AN: I hope you liked this chapter! Spoiler for you, next chapter may have the appearance of Jennifer Hayes! Also I'm starting to wrap up the story now :-(So it looks like there will be about two more chapters and an epilogue (maybe two parts to the epilogue depending on how big it is)

13. We Are Young

Happier With You

AN - Hey all! Thank you for the love on chapter 12 :-) I know it was a bit of a filler chapter but I am trying to wrap up all the characters stories now as I get them to where I want them to be by the end of the story.

Your reviews are amazing and I just want to address one in particular. Jen appears in this chapter and has definitely NOT had a baby with Mike! I did originally think of the possibility when I wrote chapter 2 but I decided against it because I don't think my Mileven brain would physically allow that! Haha

I hope you enjoy this chapter it's got a lot more Mileven fluff and is getting me ready for chapter 14 which is going to have A LOT of Mileven fluff and mature content ;-) (Finally!)

Please review and let me know what you think and follow or favourite the story if you're enjoying it :-)

Chapter 13 – We Are Young

"I don't think the doctors would approve of this," El giggled as Mike piggy backed her out of the hospital as they walked to his parked car.

"Well I'm discharged now. Nothing they can do about it!" Mike said cheerfully, relieved to finally be out of the hospital and spend a bit of time with his girl, even though she was going to spend most of the morning shopping. How she needed any more clothes was beyond him.

El moved her chin from his shoulder and started to plant little kisses against Mike's neck and below his ear making him shudder from the pleasure.

"You need to stop doing that..." he said choked, biting his lip as they walked to the car.

"And why is that?" El whispered into his ear. He stopped and turned

his head slightly to try and look at her. "Because if you don't stop there'll be no girls shopping trip. I'll be driving us to lovers lane instead."

El laughed, "you're so silly." She mused giving him a firm kiss on the cheek as he carried on walking, a big love sick grin on his face. *God* she made him crazy. He had never wanted her so badly as he did now.

"So who are we getting first?" Mike asked as he put the key into the car door and El jumped down from his back, handing him his backpack she had been holding for him.

"Let's get Emma first and then Max." El said as she walked around the car to the passenger seat and hoped in, turning the radio on as she snorted at Mike getting stuck in the driver side.

"Jesus El! How tiny are you." he gaped as he awkwardly reached for the lever to pull the seat back.

"I think it's more to do with the fact that you're so *tall*." El scoffed watching him with amusement. Mike gave her a look of amused frustration, "I think it's a combination of the two." He commented as he finally got comfy.

They enjoyed the car journey to the cabin, the radio on full blast and El's hand resting on Mike's thigh with his hand covering hers. They sang their hearts out to the music playing and El felt a wonderful feeling of nostalgia rush over her, it was like they were back in high school together but this time she was getting to experience the best moments of her life all over again.

When they arrived at the cabin, El and Mike both got out of the car and held hands as they made the quick walk to her old home. As they arrived El was surprised to see Hunter and Emma were already outside, sitting on the porch and basking in the sunlight.

She noted that they were both smiling and laughing, El took that as a very good sign that this matchmaking could work.

"Hey El, hey Mike." Hunter called seeing them both approaching. Emma looked up too and gave them a smile.

"Hi guys," El said happily, swinging her arm with Mike's happily. Hunter gave Mike a smile, "so you escaped the hospital then?"

Mike laughed, "yeah thanks to you. The doctors were quite annoyed when my CT scan was clear as they still couldn't find an explanation." He said cheerfully.

Hunter snorted, "I bet that doctor is pulling his hair out right now. Ah well, better that than them finding out about my powers."

"Exactly. So now I'm a medical marvel thanks to you." Mike said grinning at Hunter who scoffed and shook his head like it was nothing.

El squeezed Mike's hand hoping he'd remember that she wanted him to propose something to Emma and Hunter. "So me, El and our friends are going to the movies tonight to see Back to the Future Part 3. Do you two wanna come? It'd be on me. My treat." He asked them eagerly.

Hunter seemed interested but Emma looked nervous. "I've never been to see a movie before..." she said self-consciously.

"I hadn't either. But it's really fun. And you get snacks!" El said enthusiastically hoping to tempt Emma.

"It is fun Em. I used to go all the time back in West Virginia." Hunter said fondly and El quickly noticed he had given Emma a nickname, she found herself grinning at this fact because it just seemed intimate somehow.

El was pleased to see that the moment Hunter suggested it would be fun, Emma was on board. "Okay, that sounds great thank you." She said to Mike before turning her smile onto Hunter. El realised that Emma really wasn't subtle at all with her feelings and she had no idea how she had missed it all these years.

"So ready to go Emma?" El asked cheerfully, excited to ask her friend if anything happened last night between the couple.

"Yep." Emma said brushing off her jeans and standing up, Hunter moved too and leaned against the pillar on the porch.

"Good luck today Hunter getting your ID." El said turning to her friend with a big grin, she was so thrilled for him and could see he was too, but he had a nervous energy to him as well.

"Yeah we'll celebrate later." Mike added in making Hunter grin at the prospect. "Thanks guys. Your dad will be here in a bit so at least I haven't got long to wait." He said gratefully.

"I'll see you when I get back..." Emma said to him carefully, like she was trying not to sound too eager or too nervous.

Hunter nodded and gave her a lopsided smile. "See you later Em."

"See you later." She said anxiously and El tugged her along to get her to finally move.

"Have fun girls! And good luck Mike." Hunter teased as they walked to the car. Mike chuckled next to El and turned his head back, "thanks man, I'm gonna need it."

The moment they got into the car, El turned to Mike and said, "close your ears okay?" He snorted hoping she realised he couldn't physically cover his ears whilst driving. "Er...okay?"

When El seemed to look satisfied he wasn't paying attention, he noticed out of the corner of his eye that she had turned to look at Emma in the back seat. "So how did last night go? Did you like the film?"

Mike pretended to not listen but was curious as to whatever they were talking about.

"Yeah it was...good. We watched the film and we both liked it. That sex scene was a bit awkward though!" Emma said anxiously.

El giggled and Mike's eyes widened wondering what movie they were on about. "But it's really romantic. And Patrick Swayze is so handsome. Apparently he's got another film coming out soon called

Ghost." El said eagerly making Mike roll his eyes.

He knew the film she was now talking about, it had to be Dirty Dancing, one of El's all-time favourites. They had watched it many times together...well attempted to watch it before making out, sometimes wandering off to the bedroom instead. Mike's cheeks blushed and a smile crept on his face as he replayed the memories.

"So what happened after the film?" El pressed.

"We just talked. We spoke about our families and our grief over losing them. We talked about what we both went through at the lab..."

The car was quiet for a moment and Mike tightened his grip on the steering wheel, knowing that El always became sad talking about the lab.

Emma cleared her throat and continued, "so then we were talking for ages and Hunter pulled out another blanket and we both just kind of fell asleep on the couch."

"*Together?*" El asked with excitement and Mike smirked knowing her bambi eyes had gone even bigger.

"Well yeah..." Emma said trying to suppress her giggle.

The girls continued to gossip and Mike continued to pretend he was completely zoned out. The problem only got worse when Max joined the group and also weighed her opinion on Emma and Hunter's potential budding romance.

Even Mike couldn't help but hope that Emma and Hunter found love, and if it was with each other than that was even better. At least they both knew what they had been through and could comfort one another. But even Mike could see they were definitely getting along well.

The girls continued to gossip and giggle making Mike think that he had Holly, Lily and Georgia in the car for a second. He allowed his amused smile to creep onto his face but made sure to keep his eyes on the road so he wasn't scolded by the girls.

15 minutes later Mike pondered the strange turn of events of the summer. It had been a week, just *one* week and Mike had been reunited with his soulmate, tried to prove his love to her, met Hunter and hated him, took El to the fair and had a blast, travelled to Indianapolis to try and save Emma with El and Hunter only to be almost killed after being shot, be healed, become friends with Hunter and then finally get El back. And now here he was, his arms being used as a carrier for El, Max and Emma's clothes. He smiled to himself, what a week!

The store was hot but Mike tried to be as patient as he could with the girls, feeling weighed down by all their clothes in his hands. El despite getting a telling off from Hopper the night before, had been given some money to buy her and Emma some clothes. Mike knew that Hopper was also under the spell of El's stunning eyes just like him.

After what felt like 10 hours, the girls were happy with their choices and Mike's arms almost collapsed onto the sales counter as the lady started to scan the products. His relief was short lived as he was then handed all of the bags which he took with a sigh.

Mike followed the girls to the doors thinking of how happy he'd be when he chucked these bags into the boot of his car. He almost collided with the girls when he realised they had stopped.

Max and El looked frozen and Emma just stood looking at them as confused as Mike did. He peered over them, being so much taller and he too froze in utter panic.

Jennifer Hayes had just walked into the shop and almost walked into El and Max. She looked at them in surprise and then saw Mike and she averted her eyes quickly from him. He too looked away from her and instead stared at the back of El's head of thick curls. Mike was terrified of what she was thinking right now.

"El," Jen finally said in surprise. "I...I didn't know you were back. Or are you just visiting?" Mike admired that Jen had made the first move because he knew he couldn't, he couldn't even find his voice, all he could feel was his heart pounding in his throat in dread.

Max bravely nudged El slightly in an attempt to get her to say something. Mike watched with nervous eyes as his girlfriend took a heavy breath because he could see her shoulders tense and then relax slightly.

"I'm back...but I'm moving to Massachusetts at the end of the summer. To be with Mike." El said slowly and Mike knew she trying to control her feelings.

At the mention of his name, Jen gave him a nervous glance before turning back to El. "Oh...that's...that's erm good. I'm happy for you." She said smiling slightly. Mike could tell that Jen was being genuine but just felt incredibly awkward, he couldn't blame her.

"Thank you." El mumbled quietly.

Max seemed to be the first to break out of the horrible tension. "So we should get going then ladies before Mike's arms fall off." She said doing a fake smile and turning back to Mike to give him a look that said, "move it".

Mike cleared his throat and nodded, "yeah let's get going." El seemed to come out of her coma at the sound of his voice and she moved back, taking a few bags out of his right hand and then entwining their fingers.

"Good bye Jen," El said to the nervous girl who gave them all a quick smile. "Bye!" she said looking immensely relieved to be able to move away from them and get as far into the store as she could.

Mike exhaled in relief and squeezed El's hand. She looked up at him, her eyes were vulnerable for a moment, but as he leaned down and gave her a sweet loving kiss that lingered just a bit, her eyes brightened and she tightened her hold on his hand.

El and Mike walked a bit behind Max and Emma but he could still just about hear the red head explaining who Jennifer was to Emma. He frowned when he heard the word "one night stand" but he guessed that was closest to the truth.

Mike glanced down at El who was a little quiet and it made him

nervous. "Are you okay?" he asked her breathlessly, terrified that he had hurt her all over again.

El stopped making Mike come to a halt too. She nodded slightly, "yes I'm okay. I felt...a bit jealous when I saw her. She's pretty and she's seen you...intimately."

Mike cringed feeling terrible. "El she's no you. You are the most *beautiful* woman I have ever seen. You are *perfection*." He whispered, taking his hand from her grasp so he could stroke her cheek delicately with his thumb.

El sighed, "I was jealous...but then I remembered *I* have you now. You're *mine*." She said biting her lip as if worried she'd been too dominant, but Mike loved it. He felt a big grin spreading on his face and he leaned his face into hers, so their breath tickled each other's faces.

"El, you were my first and you're going to be my *last*. I love you, *only* you. I want only you." He whispered to her, pressing his lips to her cheek and then slowly letting them trail to her lips. She captured his mouth with hers and moved her free hand into his hair, pulling him in closer.

Mike moaned against her lips feeling the sexual tension in his body rising dramatically as she controlled the kiss with power and desire. It was so *hot*.

"Hello! People waiting here to get in the car!" Max's voice shouted across the parking lot and Mike wanted nothing more than to flip her the birdy but he didn't have any free hands.

El giggled against his lips and then pulled away, looking over at Emma and Max, giving them an apologetic look. But as they joined hands again and walked over to the car with the biggest grins on their faces, Mike knew that neither of them were sorry.

The party walked rather disruptively on the side walk with their two honorary members. Max and Lucas were holding hands and leading the way, Hunter and Emma were walking closely, talking and

laughing quietly and Will was trying to restrain Dustin who was teasing El and Mike endlessly.

El wasn't surprised though, her and Mike couldn't keep their hands or lips off each other. It was like they were making up for lost time. Mike had both his arms wrapped around her waist and El's arms were draped around the back of his neck as she pulled him closer, continuing their deep kisses as they attempted to walk at the same time.

"Right, bets on Mike and El leaving the movie half way through to bone?" Dustin called around his friends, all of them cringing and laughing.

"I'm in." Max called from the front. "Me too." Sniggered Lucas. El rolled her eyes but carried on making out with Mike, loving the grip he had on her body, she could practically feel him shaking from his lust for her and it excited her, it made her feel confident.

They had reframed from being too touchy feely at dinner with his family and El had distracted herself by catching up with Nancy and Jonathan. She hadn't realised how much she had missed them both. And as they all ate at the Wheeler family table, El looked around with a smile, realising how much she had missed them all, including Ted who made her laugh with his complete obliviousness.

After behaving herself for the two hours she was with his family, El was now thoroughly enjoying getting lost in her passion with Mike as they struggled through the movie theatre doors, wanting to be as close as possible.

Mike reluctantly pulled away to get into line and pay for the tickets for him, El, Hunter and Emma but El made sure to keep his hand in hers, a dreamy smile on her face when she stared at him. She just couldn't believe she had him back. She was his *girlfriend* again and nothing could make her happier.

El hesitantly broke away from Mike and promised him she'd be right back. She slipped to the side of Dustin and gave him a smile. "Will you do something for me?" she asked.

Dustin scoffed, "as long as it doesn't involve kissing the guys or giving you my hat, then sure!"

"Will you flirt with Emma?"

He looked at El with confused amusement. "But doesn't she like Hunter?"

El grinned, "yes she does but I've been thinking and I want to see if he gets jealous of her being flirted with by someone else. Then we'll know if he's got feelings for her." She said excitedly.

"Ah yes this could work..." Dustin said rubbing at his chin as he thought the plan over. "So this is like the girlfriend trials now?"

El rolled her eyes and snorted, "not exactly. It's just a simple test. So are you in?"

Dustin smirked, "getting to flirt with an attractive girl? I'm totally in."

They gave each other a knowing grin and then separated. As El clung onto Mike's arm, she watched with amusement as Dustin went up to Emma and Hunter who had just got popcorn and mindlessly flirted with her.

It had to have been the funniest thing she had ever heard. Chat up lines were coming out of Dustin like there was no tomorrow. She caught a few of them, "There must be something wrong with my eyes; I can't take them off of you", "if you were a triangle, you would be an acute one!" and "do you believe in love at first sight? Or should I walk by again?"

Whilst Emma looked confused and slightly uneasy, El was more concerned with Hunter's face. She had watched him closely, his smile from chatting with Emma had disappeared and he instead had a frown and a strange glint in his eye as he watched Dustin endlessly flirting.

After a while, El managed to get Hunter alone whilst Emma went to the bathroom. "You okay?" she tried to ask him casually.

"Er...yeah." He said distracted.

"What's wrong?" El asked innocently.

"Nothing. It's just...erm...does your friend Dustin like Emma?" he finally blurted out and El tried to hide her satisfied expression at the look on his face. He was worried.

"Maybe. I mean he's a bit of a flirt anyway. But I don't really think she's interested. She has a thing for blondes instead." El said giving him a little smirk before walking away. She looked back and noticed his pleased smile which turned shy when Emma returned.

Once they were all sat down for the movie, Dustin turned to El with a proud grin. "So how did I do?"

"Very good. There's definitely something between them." She whispered back to him, and they both leaned forward to see Emma and Hunter at the end of the aisle laughing with one another and sharing popcorn.

"So can I get my girlfriend back now cupid?" El heard Mike's voice teasing in her ear. His arm was around her and he brought her closer to him. She bit her lip to stop herself from giggling at the sensation of his mouth and breath against her ear.

She turned to him and leaned in for a kiss, ignoring the gagging and groans of her friends. El placed a hand on Mike's smooth cheek and stroked it, sighing in happiness. "I love you," she caressed against his lips.

His mouth curled into a big grin that she knew would hurt his cheeks. "I love you too." He breathed out, nudging their noses together playfully. El moved in for another kiss, and closed her eyes relishing the moment of pure love when their lips met. They fit so perfectly together and the feeling of him made her heart swoon and her body erupt into fiery passion.

El moved her arms around his neck and pulled him even nearer and Mike brought his hands to her back, pushing her closer to his body. She could have stayed like that forever, locked in a hungry embrace but Max, Lucas and Dustin decided that was the moment to chuck popcorn at her and Mike.

They broke out of their embrace laughing and fighting off the popcorn attack. "Someone *please* pour some water over them before they erupt!" Max joked shaking her head at them, amused and grossed out.

El huffed smiling and leaned her head against Mike's chest as he wrapped his arm around her shoulders. "We can't help the fact that we're in love." Mike said to their friends, a foolish grin on his face.

"Well just tone it down or we're going to have to kick you out of the party..." Lucas teased to them before putting his arm around Max.

Mike scoffed and looked at El amused, she gave him a warm smile and snuggled closer to him. They stopped their making out, but they held onto each other tightly. After all their time apart their bodies craved each other and El didn't think she'd ever get enough of it.

14. Like The First Time

Happier With You

AN: Sorry for not getting this out to you yesterday but I've been working hard on this chapter as it was very important to me that I got it right. Please let me know what you think :-)

Warning: Fluff and **smut**!

Chapter 14 – Like the First Time

Summer 1990

It was two days since Mike had been released from the hospital and El sat around a camp fire with the party, Hunter and Emma, laughing and tucking into a smore that Mike had just made for her.

The sun was dipping low on the horizon, the warm summer evening keeping them all cosy as well as the crackling fire that Will and Lucas had built and lit. El watched distant fire flies in the surrounding trees just past lovers lake where they were all sat having the time of their life.

El couldn't help but grin as she looked around at the group, she couldn't have asked for better company. Her smile faltered as she looked over at Hunter and Emma as she thought about how much she was going to miss them. To everyone's surprise except El's, Hunter had asked Emma if she wanted to come with him to West Virginia. She had of course said yes and they were leaving in the morning to start their new adventure.

El had gotten so used to their company and sought comfort in the fact that they would always be her soul sister and brother, both knowing what she had suffered in the lab because all of their experiences were so similar. She knew they had her phone number and Mike promised her they would take a road trip to West Virginia once Emma and Hunter were settled in, but it didn't stop her from wanting them to stay.

She couldn't deny that they had to be able to live the lives they wanted to and El had known returning to West Virginia was something Hunter had wanted probably from the moment he left his home state. Everything felt like it was slowly slotting into place, like a jigsaw puzzle that was now completed with a beautiful image and El was more than thankful.

"You okay babe?" Mike asked softly bringing El out of her daze. She turned to him with a big smile, her eyes lighting up as she looked at the love of her life. "I'm more than okay. I'm perfectly happy." El mused biting her lip with apprehension as she watched her boyfriend.

His dark eyes sparkled with joy and he shuffled over so they were sat as close as they could possibly be whilst they gave each dreamy stares as they munched on their smores.

"Right who's for a beer?" Dustin said panting slightly as he carried a large cooler.

Mike rolled his eyes in amusement, "where did you even get that?"

"Steve." Lucas and Max answered together, like this was completely obvious which even El knew was true.

"Yep my main man Steve hooked us up with this. Guys just think, we're almost 20, so that means next year we can totally buy this ourselves!" Dustin exclaimed with excitement as he opened the cooler and Lucas, Will and Max hovered near by, looking at the options of alcohol.

Dustin began handing out beers to the group and he finally approached Mike and El. "Mike?" he said smiling offering out a bottle to the handsome dark-haired man.

Mike looked immediately uncomfortable. "Er...no thanks."

El turned to him in confusion. "Why don't you want one?"

"Er...I haven't drank since...you know. I don't drink anymore." He said, his cheeks turning red, his eyes full of shame.

Dustin raised his eyebrow at the awkward scene and gestured the

bottle to El. "Want to try one?" he asked her with a mischievous look in his eyes.

El grinned, "yeah why not." She said relaxed taking the bottle and giving Mike a smile, hoping he'd realise that he didn't need to feel ashamed anymore. El had put the past where it belonged. Mike was hers, he was her future and that was all that mattered.

Mike watched her slightly playfully as she took a sip of the beer. "What do you think?" he asked her with genuine interest.

El pursed her lips and looked at the bottle deep in thought. "I think... that is the most *disgusting* thing I've ever drank."

Her boyfriend burst out laughing and put his arm around El. "You don't have to drink it babe."

"Trust me I won't be..." El said grimacing as she placed the bottle down on the dried grass and turned her attention to Mike. Her eyes almost devoured his face, as she took in his sharp cheek bones, his floppy dark haired, his pouty lips and his dark eyes that made her shiver.

"What?" he asked her laughing slightly at the intense look on her face.

El blushed but kept his gaze. "I was just looking at how handsome my boyfriend is." She said slyly. El thought she had spoken quietly but the whole group all made moans and gagging noises.

"Are you *sure* you were looking at Wheeler?" Max teased making Mike and El both roll their eyes whilst the rest of the group laughed.

"Yes I was definitely talking about *Wheeler*." El answered playfully as she shuffled closer to Mike and sat on his lap. His arms hugged her to him and he lay his head on her shoulder, kissing the curve of her neck and grinning against her skin.

"You two *definitely* need to get a room..." Lucas muttered and did a shudder before being handed his second beer from Max.

Mike and El ignored them and basked in their romantic moment and

tender kisses as the night drew on. Will pulled out a radio and turned it on full blast whilst the group started to get drunk.

Hunter, Dustin, Lucas and Will all took part in a chugging competition whilst Emma and Max cheered them on, Max getting incredibly competitive, "come on baby! Beat their asses!" she screamed at her boyfriend.

"They are ridiculous." Mike laughed gently, making El turn slightly in his hold to look at his face which was so close to hers. She exhaled sharply as she took in his lips and felt his sweet breath on her face. Mike's laugh disappeared and his eyes grew darker as he stared at her, one thing on their minds.

Mike leaned in and pressed his lips to El's, one of his hands holding her around her stomach moved to her cheek as he deepened the kiss, their breathing heavy as El opened Mike's mouth with hers and their tongues met stroking one another furiously. El felt like she melted into an oblivion of desire and hadn't even realised that the chugging competition had ended.

"Ew the sickos are back!" Dustin shouted whilst everyone laughed and Mike and El pulled away from their kiss and looked at their friends with a glare.

"Dustin do you realise you have been interrupting our kisses since we were 12?" Mike huffed.

Dustin, Lucas and Will all gasped with laughter and El noticed that Mike's cheeks had gone red, having clearly said something in the heat of the moment and now wishing he could take it back.

"So, when *was* the first kiss I interrupted?" Dustin asked with wide excited eyes.

Mike looked away from his friends clearly too embarrassed to talk but El didn't see anything wrong with the question and answered for him. "It was just after I broke the mouth breather's arm. Mike was cleaning me up in the bathroom and I wanted to kiss him." El said simply, the memory one of her favourites of that time. She had hardly known what a kiss was, but it was just a chemical reaction she

had felt for Mike, in that moment her body had just taken over and known what to do. Well that was until Dustin had interrupted them.

Dustin spluttered, "what?! So when I came to tell you Lucas was calling us...you two were *sucking face*?!"

"No we weren't!" Mike called cringing through his embarrassment.

"Well we were going to until you interrupted us..." El said holding onto Mike's arms that were keeping her close to him.

Lucas snorted, "so whilst I was trying to race to you and warn you... you two were doing *that*."

"Oh my *god* does it even matter? They've sucked face to last them 100 years. It's no big deal!" Max shouted exasperatedly and El couldn't help but grin knowing her best friend was drunk.

The song on the radio turned on to *Boys of Summer* and Max gasped looking at El. "Do you remember this one?" El couldn't help but laugh in response because of course she did. El had heard it on the radio of her first sleepover with Max who had moaned that it reminded her so much of California. The girls had danced on the bed to the song and it was one of their favourites.

"Come on Ellie!" Max said playfully, her hand held out for El who giggled and took it much to Mike's disappointment when she jumped up from his lap. The girls danced next to the fire, pulling an embarrassed Emma along with them who then pulled a laughing Hunter. Before they knew it, they were all dancing, well except Mike who was doing the robot because he refused point blank to dance.

El laughed and moved her hands to his hips just as *Get Into The Groove* came on. She gave him a sly smile as she made him move his body to the music. He bit his lip watching her amused, moving his hands to her waist. "That's it! See I told you that you could dance." She told him flirting as she moved their bodies together.

She watched Mike, a fire burning in her eyes and a blush creeping onto his cheeks as they moved closer, their bodies merely inches from each other as everything else seemed to fade away and all there was,

was Mike and El. She could feel a tension start to build in her body and it was something she had started experiencing with Mike from the age of 15 but now it was almost unbearable. El knew it was time to do something about it.

She crossed her arms around the back of Mike's neck and pulled his face down to hers. Before she could get the words out, Mike spoke breathlessly, "do you want to go for a drive?" His eyes looked nervous.

El couldn't help but grin and nodded, "yeah...I'd love that." She said trying to control her pounding heart. Everyone else was too preoccupied with dancing, shouting and drinking, but El moved over to Max and gave her a hug, whispering into her ear. "Me and Mike are leaving."

Max giggled which was unlike her and whispered back to El. "And are you coming back?"

El bit her lip anxiously and looked over at Mike who was putting their things in the car. "No. If he asks, tell my dad I'm staying over at yours." she told Max who smirked and nodded.

Mike sighed in relief when El agreed to leave the campfire and go on a drive with him. He just really wanted some alone time with his girlfriend, he felt like they had definitely been deprived of it and he exactly where he wanted to go.

El had moved her hand onto his thigh and he felt every nerve ending in his body spark with electricity as she absentmindedly stroked the material of his shorts. Mike gulped anxiously and kept his eyes on the road as best as he could.

"So where are we going?" El asked grinning as she looked out at the dark landscape.

"Well I was thinking maybe the quarry?" Mike asked nervously, even though he wasn't sure why he felt so anxious. The quarry had become an important place to him and El as a couple. It was where she had saved his life and the place where they had reunited after two years

apart.

"The quarry sounds perfect..." El mused as she lay her head back on the passenger seat and sighed in contentment. Her obvious happiness made Mike's heart swell. He just loved her so much.

It didn't take long to get to the quarry from lovers lake and Mike pulled up, grabbing blankets out of the boot whilst El walked to a sandy flat area near the cliff edge. Mike threw the blankets down and he and El simultaneously lay down together.

Mike lay on his back, his arm draped around El's shoulders as she snuggled her head onto his chest and wrapped her arms around his abdomen causing goose bumps to rise up his spine.

He couldn't help but exhale with pure love, this right here was his happy place, having El in his arms, her heart beating with his in a perfect symphony.

They were both silent for a moment as they looked up at the stars in awe. Mike leaned forward slightly and kissed the top of El's head before laying back and marvelling at her beauty. She was wearing a white summer dress that fell to her knees and it contrasted perfectly with her sun kissed skin. She was complete and utter *perfection*.

Mike played with El's curls for a moment and watched her deep in thought. "It's kind of sad Hunter and Emma are leaving tomorrow." He said quietly.

El turned slightly so she could look up at him. "I'm going to miss them." She said sadly. Mike sighed, "yeah...me too." He spoke honestly. It was so strange how things could change so quickly, but now that he wasn't hating Hunter he had grown to really like him and Emma too, who reminded him of Max because under the hard exterior was a really kind and caring person.

"But I meant it when I said we'll go on a road trip and visit them." Mike added seriously looking down into his girlfriend's bambi eyes.

She changed position so her chin rested on her crossed arms on top of Mike's chest. He tried to pretend that his body wasn't super sensitive

from the fact that she was almost on top of him.

"When would we go?" she asked curiously.

"Well we could go at Christmas break if they're all set up somewhere. Or spring break." He offered hoping she'd be happy with the answer.

El smiled thoughtfully, "I really think it won't be long until they're an official couple."

Mike chuckled, "your matchmaking skills are definitely better than Dustin's."

His girlfriend snorted in amusement and planted a kiss onto his chest making his breathing rapidly increase. He knew he had a t-shirt on, but this closeness with El after all this time was wreaking havoc in his body.

"So...what happens next...with us? With moving." El said softly, her eyes anxious. Mike hated to think she was stressing about moving from Hawkins and in to the unknown.

"Well next week we'll start looking for an apartment and jobs." He told her, leaning in again to kiss her forehead, relishing in the fact that he was allowed to do so.

"I don't care what job I do, as long as we're together." El said smiling so sweetly that Mike felt his heart melt on the spot.

"I want you to do a job that makes you happy El. I've got enough savings and college money to cover probably 3 months of rent. So I don't want you to settle with any plain job okay?" He told her calmly.

El nodded and grinned, her eyes lighting up so beautifully. "And will you make me eggos every day?"

Mike laughed and went back to stroking her hair. "Of course. Every single day...unless you actually fancy something else for once." He teased. El immediately shook her head, "absolutely not. Especially because *you* make the best eggos."

He felt himself immediately blush, "you really think so?" he said

surprised. El nodded and grinned, "you always have."

Mike sighed and looked at her with adoration. "God you're so cute." He said dreamily. It was El's turn to blush and she slowly pushed her head up off his chest and used her hands to lift her slightly so she was leaning over Mike. His heart was immediately racing.

"I love you." El said breathlessly, staring into his eyes in a way that made him *feel* her love, as if he could see every atom of what made it. "I love you too," he said every word embedded with the deepest desire.

El leaned down to him so that their foreheads were touching, their eyes still connected as their lips were inches from each other. The smell of El being inhaled through his nose and mouth was completely intoxicating.

Mike moved one hand to cup El's jaw and the other moved to her upper back, closing the gap between them as he caressed her lips with his, feeling like he was drowning in his longing for her.

El immediately deepened the kiss and pressed her upper body to his, making a groan be ripped from his chest as he tried to pull her even closer to him, wanting no distance at all.

Their kiss became hungry and desperate and Mike could feel that he was already hard, all the blood rushing from his head and down to his gut wanting El so much that it was almost intolerable. His hands moved down the curves of her body greedily until they found her hips and in one movement Mike pulled her completely on top of him. They both gasped at the sudden contact and as El adjusted herself, he knew she could tell how much he wanted her.

El's lips started to kiss down Mike's jaw line making him pant for breath from the sudden pleasure. As she moved lower to his neck licking and nibbling at his skin, he gasped in frustration from wanting her so badly and moved his hands to her bare legs. His fingers worked their way up her thighs and he gripped the skin desperately.

El moved back to his lips and their mouths crashed together

demanding for the sexual tension in the air to be let loose. Mike couldn't take it anymore, "I...want...you...so...bad." He said shaking from his lust for the most beautiful woman in the world who was currently straddling him.

Mike watched panting as El broke the kiss and stared at him through dilated eyes. "Let's go to the cabin." She said breathlessly.

"A-aren't Hunter and Emma staying there?" he asked anxiously.

El shook her head, "no they're staying in a motel near the train station tonight." She said quickly, her chest rising and falling rapidly from the desire pouring out of them.

Mike felt a relieved and excited grin rush onto his face. "Let's go." He said eagerly helping a giggling El up from the floor.

He didn't think he'd ever driven so quickly in his life and they arrived at the cabin 5 minutes later. El walked in first and then Mike hesitated by the front door, staring at her with longing but also hesitation.

"Are you...are you sure?" He whispered to her across the room. Mike knew he had hurt her and it was something he could never take back. Did she really want to do this with him?

El looked at him for a moment, doing nothing but hold his gaze. He knew she'd be able to tell the desperation in his eyes for her. She smiled slowly and then her fingers went to the hem of her dress and she lifted it off her body.

Mike gaped like a fish, his eyes heavy with want as he stared at her body, almost naked except for the white underwear and bra. "You...are so beautiful." He choked out, not able to barely breathe.

When El's eyes burned with passion and she gave him a shy smile, Mike couldn't take the tension a second longer. He rushed to her and hoisted her body up so her legs wrapped around his waist and her arms flung around his neck, kissing him frantically as he walked them into her old bedroom.

They didn't even make it to the bed before Mike pushed El up against

the wall and ambushed her with needy kisses all over her jaw line and down her neck. She flipped her head back and moaned, the noise making Mike's erection go rock hard.

In desperation Mike couldn't stop himself from grinding against El and gasping at the sensation with her. He pushed away from the wall and dropped her onto the bed, crawling up her body so their lips could once again begin their passionate battle.

El's legs wrapped around his hips, drawing him closer to her as they mercilessly bumped and grinded together, both exhaling sharply from their utter pleasure and gratification it brought. Mike could feel himself physically shaking from how badly he wanted her.

He felt El's hands move from his back and reach for his t-shirt which seconds later was thrown onto the floor. Her fingers then moving onto his shorts which were roughly pushed down, Mike helping to discard of them by kicking them off his legs until they disappeared onto the floor.

El broke from their kiss and looked down his body, her eyes glazing over with desire as her gaze lingered on his erection. Mike stared at her, panting senselessly when he looked over her incredible body.

He gasped as El suddenly flipped them over and straddled his hips making his erection brush against her heat, causing them to both groan loudly. Mike grabbed onto her hips and moved them against his own, the pleasure increasingly to boiling point.

El's hands moved up his stomach and planted onto his chest, her fingers gripping the skin slightly as she tossed her head back and enjoyed the feeling of them rubbing against one another.

She finally leaned down and began planting kisses across his skin, causing Mike to shudder from the fire fit to burst in his body. The adrenaline rush was unlike anything he had ever experienced, this moment just felt so incredibly intense.

El sat again on his hips and moved her hands to her back, unclipping her bra and flinging it to the floor. Mike instinctly sat up so their chests were almost touching.

His eyes went to her perfect breasts and he groaned deeply with desire. He tentatively moved his hands down to touch them, cupping them in his hands and stroking her nipples with his thumbs. El gasped and moved her hands into his hair, her grip almost painful as she pulled his head to her chest.

Mike knew what she wanted and whilst groping one breast he leaned into the other, taking it in his mouth and sweeping his tongue across the nipple, her moans of pleasure spurring him on. He attacked her breasts with kisses, licks and nibbles until El was practically quivering with need.

"I want you...I want you *now*." El whined as she gasped from the indulgence of Mike devouring her upper body. She felt him nod breathlessly against her chest and she was flipped back over onto the mattress.

Mike kissed her with need as El's hands went back into his dark curly locks. Oh how she had been so desperate to feel the soft strands within her hands and now he was all hers again and she could feel an odd dominance starting to pound through her blood.

Mike's lips started on her neck and slowly moved down her body whilst El bit her lip watching him with hungry eyes. His tongue swept in between her breasts and down her flat stomach.

His dark eyes slowly looked up her body until they engaged with her heavy lidded eyes. El knew he was asking permission to take off her panties and she nodded quickly, desperate for him to *really* touch her, to deal with the burning need she had for him in her core.

Mike's fingers hooked into the white panties and he pulled them down her thighs and off her legs. El felt a thrill of passion rush through her like fire when she saw how Mike was looking at her naked body.

"You are so beautiful..." Mike murmured against her inner thigh as he started to plant a trail of kisses there. El gulped, her throat dry, her eyes wild with boiling lust. Her body bucked the moment Mike's tongue met her centre, causing a loud moan to escape from her

throat.

El gripped Mike's hair tighter as he made her feel waves of pleasure again and again, his mouth and tongue dominating her centre.

It had been so long and El's body was ecstatic and sensitive beyond belief. It didn't take long before the building heat in her gut made her body begin to twitch and gasp. "Mike!" she couldn't help but moan over and over again until she was brought over the edge and her orgasm grasped hold of her. She shouted out in pleasure and tried to desperately snap her legs together but Mike remained in between her thighs.

El took Mike's shoulder and pulled him up impatiently to her lips. Their mouths crashed together in a breathless kiss. "I love you, I love you so much." Mike panted against her mouth.

"I love you too. And I want you *right now*." El told him desperately, her eyes pleading with his, making the fire in his eyes rise to new levels.

Mike pushed himself up on his hands and with El's assistance, they pulled his boxers off and threw them to the floor. For a moment, they both stared at each other in their most intimate moment, panting for breath, desperate for one another.

El moved up onto the pillow slightly, her legs opening slightly as she bit her lip and watched Mike with longing. He smiled at her, so lovingly and so full of want that her heart felt like it might explode. He looked down to position himself and then he froze.

"What?" El asked immediately, feeling impatience take over her once again.

"*Shit*...I don't have a condom." Mike said in frustration.

El sighed in annoyance before her eyes widened in excitement. "Wait...I think I still have my stash here." She said before jumping off the bed.

Mike laughed in surprise, "still?!"

"Well it's not like I had time to collect them is it?" she said rolling her eyes before she reached her hand under the bed and found a small box near the back. Even when she and Hopper had moved in with Joyce and Will, El had kept a stash of condoms at the cabin for when her and Mike would sneak there to get some *privacy*.

"Yes!" El said victoriously when she opened the box and there were 4 condoms left. She picked one out and let Mike pull her back onto the bed. His lips met hers immediately and they were thrown back into their needy passion for one another.

Mike rubbed himself against her core and they both gasped into one another's mouth. El was so ready for this moment to happen and thanked god when Mike grabbed the condom to put on.

In a moment of lust El took the condom out of his hands and ripped it open. He watched with heavy dark eyes as she grasped his cock and gave it a slow kiss on the tip whilst Mike hissed with desire. El placed the condom on and then lay back on the bed, ready to be together at last with her soulmate.

Mike crawled up El's body, both of them panting with overwhelming need. El held onto his biceps as he slowly entered her, their eyes never leaving one another as they stared at the other's reaction when they became one.

"Urgh...you feel...so good." Mike grunted through his pleasure as he moved slowly at first, relishing the fact that they were making love after all of this time. El wrapped her legs around his hips, drawing him in deeper making them both shout out in desire.

"Faster," El gasped feeling the rhythm of their bodies and wanting more.

Mike immediately obliged and El moaned, her head burying deeper into the pillow at how amazing it felt. Their chests panting with one another, their hips moving senselessly together.

El kissed Mike desperately as he deepened his thrusts, her gasps and cries being swallowed up by his mouth and tongue. "God I love you." He exhaled, his voice deep and seductive.

"I love you" El breathed out once his lips were moving to her neck as he simultaneously began to pound into her, making her cry out with satisfaction as her body held onto Mike for dear life.

As their bodies moved and the adrenaline raced through her blood, El felt herself once again become dominant and wanting to control the situation. Using her powers she flipped them to Mike's surprise. He stared up at her through wide curious eyes as she straddled him and rolled her hips, making him flip his head back with pleasure.

El's hands clenched onto his chest as she started to move up and down, causing cries of desire to break out from them both. Her gaze moved down to his dark eyes and she could see the fire she felt so desperately for Mike being reflected in her eyes.

"You're *mine*. Say you're mine." She gasped out moving more quickly against his hips.

"I'm *yours*." Mike said immediately, holding her gaze and panting from desire. "I'm *always*...going to be yours."

El hated that the suppressed self-esteem issues caused by what she had seen in the void decided to rear their head up now she was in the heat of passion with Mike. She wanted to be his only one, she knew she was the only one he truly loved but she wanted to remind him that he was only hers.

Mike could read her eyes like no one else and she knew he saw the emotions she was feeling. He immediately sat up, El was still moving up and down but now it became much more intimate. Their bare chests pressed together panting frantically, their eyes never left one another except for when they were kissing desperately and Mike's hands moved to El's hip so they bounced together.

They moaned in unison as they brought each other closer to falling off the edge. "I *love* you. You are the most beautiful woman in the world. You are my *only* one." Mike whispered to her, their eyes locked in an intimate moment as they moved closer to their orgasm.

El felt her heart swoon and her confidence begin to rise again. She smiled at him through the pleasure and bounced more frantically,

Mike grunted in awe and his fingers dug into her hips.

"Urgh babe yes...just like that." He gasped finally closing his eyes, unable to take the building fire. El could feel her whole body quivering as it prepared her for her undoing. Mike's hips jutted against hers as he pounded into her and that was finally it, her eyes slammed shut and her mouth fell open as her walls tightened around Mike. She cried out the only thing that mattered, "*Mike!*"

As her walls clenched around him, El could feel Mike's cock throbbing inside of her and he gasped, "*El!*" as his orgasm hit him and they both held tightly onto each other riding the wave together.

Mike collapsed back onto the bed in exhaustion with El still clinging to him. They both panted trying to get their breaths. El couldn't stop the huge grin appearing on her tired face as the endorphins rushed through her body.

"That was –"

"Incredible." Mike answered for her breathlessly.

El gently pulled off Mike and lay to his side whilst he pulled the condom off and threw it into the bedroom bin. He turned back to her with a loving and grateful smile. He buried his head into her neck and kissed the skin delicately. "Did I tell you how much I love you?" he whispered teasingly.

El giggled and bit her lip, her arms encircling Mike and stroking his hair. "You may have mentioned it."

Mike grinned against her skin and peppered kisses up her neck, onto her jaw line and finally kissed her full on the mouth. El kissed him back tenderly, wanting her love to flow right into the embrace.

When they finally broke from their kiss, they snuggled up under the bed and El sighed with contentment against Mike's bare chest. This wonderful man who she had loved since she was 12 years old meant everything to her. El had struggled over the years to accept she was safe, but in Mike's arms she felt truly safe. And as they fell asleep in their embrace, El knew her future, no matter rocky or smooth was

always going to begin and end with Mike.

AN: Ah I hope you enjoyed that! Please let me know what you thought! :-) We've got one more chapter to go and then the epilogue.

15. Happier With You

Happier With You

AN: Thank you so much for the love for chapter 14! Especially for the mature content because it was the first time I've ever written smut!

Here we go! The last chapter! :-(I really hope you enjoy this. I've added some more smut, so just a warning for that.

Please review and let me know your thoughts! :-)

Chapter 15 – Happier with You

Mike woke up to the feeling of warm sun beams hitting the pillow from where they streamed through the thin curtain of the bedroom. He blinked a few times to get the sleep out of his eyes and took in the beautiful vision next to him.

El was sleeping securely in Mike's arms, his firm chest pressed against the soft skin of her back whilst her hands held onto his arms securely as she slept soundly. Mike couldn't help the dreamy smile on his face as he snuggled closer to her, bringing his head to the curve of El's shoulder.

He slowly started to plant loving kisses on her skin, breathing in her natural scent and feeling happier than he could even begin to explain. Everything about this situation was right. Having El tucked up against his body, their hearts beating seamlessly together and their souls reunited was just perfect.

Mike felt El start to stir slightly and she mumbled incoherently into the pillow. He couldn't help but grin with amusement at how adorable she was. "Good morning gorgeous," Mike said against El's skin as he planted kisses up her neck and across her jawline.

El let out a little giggle and leaned her head slightly into the kisses. "Good morning handsome," she sighed happily, turned around so they were facing each other. Her arm moved to his side, and she trailed

her fingers up and down his torso.

They stared at one another for a moment, taking in each other's blissful smiles and bright eyes. "I love waking up next to you..." Mike said tenderly, his eyes not leaving El's.

"So do I. And when I'm with you, it's the best I *ever* sleep." El admitted gently, a glimpse of the past in her eyes. Mike knew that she had always had trouble sleeping following all of the traumas she had dealt with in her life. But she had always told him she never had a nightmare when she was in his arms.

In response to her words, Mike leaned in slightly, closing the small gap between them to kiss her lips softly. Their noses nudged each other playfully and their grins were equally as bashful. "I love you." Mike said breathlessly.

El beamed and stared between his dark eyes and his lips. "I love you too. So much." She whispered, closing the distance once more with another delicate kiss. It was the kind of kiss that made them savour every second and memorise the feel of one another's lips.

Their kiss became more intent and Mike felt himself become needier as they rolled around on the bed together, El ending up straddled on his lap. He looked up at her with want. "You know we don't have to get out of bed yet..." he said smirking slightly.

El grinned but her eyes turned to the clock on the bedside table. She sighed, "we've got to get ready. Hunter and Emma leave in two hours."

Whilst disappointed that he couldn't stay in bed with El all day, Mike knew that they couldn't not be at the train station when Hunter and Emma left. For one, they were their friends now, they wanted to thank them both and wave them off, and secondly the whole party was coming along too, including Joyce and Hopper who had been housing them.

"Yeah you're right." Mike said begrudgingly before adding, "but I think I'm gonna have a quick shower. There's still towels here right?"

El nodded and climbed off his lap, "yes in the second drawer in the bathroom cabinet." She said laying her head back on the pillow. She sighed and bit her lip deep in thought.

"You okay?" Mike asked watching her expression.

"Yes, I'm good." She said quickly, a grin appearing on her face. Mike gave her a lopsided smile and then got up off the bed to take his shower. He couldn't help but beam with pride when he saw El checking him out, out of the corner of his eye. They were both still very much naked.

Mike got the old shower running with relative ease, it definitely wasn't the first time he'd made use of it. He didn't have much to work with but had found a half empty bottle of shampoo and a body wash. He suspected it was from El's original stash.

He ran his hands through his wet hair, washing out the shampoo whilst smiling to himself as his mind replayed the previous night. It couldn't have been more perfect. A night out with his friends, stargazing with his beautiful girlfriend and then the opportunity to prove to her how much he loved her and how much he had missed her. Their intimacy had been on a new level, they were slightly older now and their feelings had matured. But what had not changed was how much he truly loved her and wanted her in every way.

As Mike reached for the body wash he heard the door creak open slightly. "Babe you okay?" he called out from under the stream of water.

"Yes, I just need something..." she said in a quiet voice. Before Mike could even respond, the shower curtain was yanked back and he gasped in surprised as he saw his girlfriend stood naked in all her beauty, a condom packet in her dainty hand, her eyebrow raised and a very mischievous smile on her face. What she needed became *very* clear.

Mike couldn't help but gasp in surprise and felt his body immediately heat up seeing El naked in front of him. Her body was just incredible, as if it was carved by angels. But what was *really* sexy, was her confidence. Her cheeky smile and the glint in her eyes. Mike felt

himself hardening just by looking at her.

"Come here..." he said gruffly, helping her into the tub with both hands, which didn't leave her and wrapped around her slender frame, bringing her naked body to his.

Their lips crashed together in a whirlwind of passion. Mike didn't think he would ever be able to get enough of El. Her skin felt like paradise against his quivering body and he wanted her more than ever. They gasped for breath as their lips moved in unison like they had been rehearsing for years.

El moaned against Mike's mouth causing all the blood from his brain to start rushing down to his groin in desperation. Her hands still holding the packet wrapped around his neck, drawing him down even closer and one of Mike's hands ran up El's bare back to bury itself into her now wet locks.

Mike could feel himself shaking with desire as one of El's hands slowly snaked down his wet body, her fingers teasing his throbbing cock causing him to groan loudly. They broke their kiss and stared at each with dark pleasure as El slowly moved her hand up and down his shaft, the want in their eyes almost bursting free.

"Are you teasing me?" Mike asked in a low voice, his breathing no longer steady.

El side smirked and there was that sexy glint in her eyes again. "Maybe..."

Mike moved his hands roughly to her ass and pulled her tight to him, causing them both to choke on their unsteady breath and for El to remove her hand. As Mike moved his hips against her and dropped his head back in a groan from the sensation, El was trying with shaking hands to open the condom packet.

He watched her with heavy lidded eyes as she opened the packet and took his cock in her hand once more, rolling the condom on expertly. El's eyes looked slowly up his body and finally to his face. When their eyes connected, Mike felt his heart scream with desire at the look in her eyes. She looked like she wanted him to *devour* her.

In one movement Mike grasped the back of El's wet thighs and hoisted her up against the tiled wall whilst she wrapped her arms around his neck to keep her securely in place. Mike's lips attacked El's neck and collar bone. He wanted her to know how desperately he craved her.

"You're so *hot...so sexy...*" he mumbled deeply against her skin, her scent almost overpowering him as he juttet against her.

El moaned and dug her fingers into his shoulders. "I want you right now Mike. I want you to fuck me. *Hard.*"

Mike's heart raced and his cock was rock hard at her words. El rarely swore except for when she was in the heat of passion and he couldn't help but love it. Only Mike got to see her really lose control like this, and the fact that it was his body giving her the pleasure was just incredible.

He pressed his lips to her upper jaw and nibbled on her ear lobe. "If you want it hard baby, I'll give it to you." He whispered to her, earning a moan of desire in return.

Taking a shaky breath, Mike adjusted and then pushed into her completely, both of them gasping with excitement at the feeling. There was nothing better in the entire world than being one with El.

He allowed her body to get used to the intrusion for a moment before starting to move his hips sharply, jolting El up the tiled wall slightly with every thrust. "Yes" she gasped closing her eyes and holding him even tighter.

Mike collapsed his head into the curve of her shoulder as his hands grasped her thighs firmly as he started to really pound into her. "Baby you feel amazing," he panted, his only thoughts of bringing them both the pleasure they deeply craved.

He moved his hips quicker, the sounds of their rushed breathing and bodies crashing together the only noise he could hear. Mike couldn't even hear the sound of the warm water splashing onto their bodies. He could only concentrate on the stunning body of his girlfriend that he was currently pounding into. Just the fact that he got to be the

one to do this, the fact that she was *his* was so overwhelming that it turned him on even further.

"Oh...yes...yes Mike." El sang repeating the words again and again as Mike desperately thrust into her with such a need to have her. Her head was against the tiles as she panted and opened her eyes to watch him beating into her passionately.

Mike couldn't look at her because he knew it would send him over the edge before she had even reached it. He concentrated on breathing roughly into her shoulder and kissing the skin with lust as he thrust again and again, diving in as deep as he could, his low groans mixing with her gasps.

"Uh El.." Mike grunted out, his body on fire with the sensation of plunging into El, he felt more alive than ever.

"*Fuck!* Yes Mike, yes!" El was shouting and it was music to Mike's ears, he had to bit on her shoulder to stop himself from cumming right then and there.

"Come on baby..." Mike said egging her on, pounding her as hard as possible, his hold on her thighs so tight that he was sure he might bruise her. This wasn't making love like the night before, this was raw passionate sex.

Mike could suddenly feel El trying desperately to lock her legs together as he felt her walls quivering around his aching cock. He finally raised his head from her shoulder, desperately wanting to see the moment that she reached her climax.

Her fingers teared painfully into his shoulders but he didn't care, he watched whilst pounding her hard the way her mouth opened in a cry and her head fell back in deepest pleasure as she shouted out. "MIKE!" She almost screamed with fire as he felt her walls squeeze him tightly.

The sensation along with the look on her face was too much and Mike felt himself being completely pushed off the cliff by her. "Oh *fuck!* El!" He cried out as his vision erupted into white and they climaxed together.

Whilst the aftershocks raced around their joined bodies, Mike shakenly tried with all his might to keep El up in his hold, not wanting to collapse with her just yet.

El smiled at him, almost drunk, her eyes dilated and happy. "I love you" she purred against his face. Mike couldn't contain how big and wide his grin was, he could feel the glow of love and adrenaline in his blood. "I love you too." He whispered, peppering her cheeks with sweet kisses.

After a while of delicate touches and loving words, Mike finally pulled out of El and helped her down gently. They showered together in blissful wonder and dressed to leave the cabin.

El made sure everything was how they found it and took his waiting hand. They beamed at each other, feeling so incredibly in love and happy beyond belief. They were just heading out of the bedroom door and towards the front door when it opened abruptly. Mike couldn't help but jump in surprise and guilt when he saw who was towering there.

Mike watched nervously as Hopper's eyes went straight to El, a sense of relief seemed to lower his tense shoulders before his expression became stern when he took in the sight of El and Mike holding hands and leaving her old bedroom.

There was an awkward silence before El spoke up. "Dad! What...em... what are you doing here?" They all knew she tried to speak casually, but her voice was full of nerves.

Hopper glared at them both, "did you honestly expect me to believe Max's cock and bull story that you stayed the night with her? I thought you'd took off again." He said clearly annoyed but also hurt.

Mike could feel El tense next to him with guilt. They hadn't thought about how Hopper might still be feeling on edge about El needing to leave at any moment.

"I'm *sorry* dad." El said with remorse. Mike couldn't help but feel bad too and so nodded and anxiously looked at the chief of police. "Yeah...we're sorry." He mumbled.

Hopper gave him a death stare and Mike had to quickly avert his eyes. "Let me reiterate. I thought you'd took off again...but *no*. I find you here with Wheeler." He crossed his arms and looked at the young couple.

"How many times Wheeler will I have to walk in on you with *my* daughter?" Hopper added looking at Mike with scrutinising eyes.

Mike flinched remembering all the times Hopper had caught him sneaking into the house and out of the house. He didn't know which times had been worse. But they were older now, they were almost 20 and it wasn't exactly like Hopper could stop him.

Knowing he should say, "never again sir." But also knowing it wasn't the truth and still feeling blissful despite the intrusion, Mike couldn't help but sheepishly say, "probably a lot."

El snorted in surprise at his straight up answer and Mike couldn't help the small smile on his face. He hesitantly looked up at the chief who was watching him with careful eyes.

"I swear to god Wheeler, you'd think being shot you'd take the threat seriously that *I will shoot you*. You have 5 seconds to get out of this cabin and into your car before I start shooting."

El and Mike burst out laughing and rushed out of the cabin whilst Hopper pinched the bridge of his nose with the look of someone who knew he was losing a battle.

After a not so awkward car journey with her dad, they picked up Hunter and Emma and headed for the train station.

The station was already filled with Dustin, Lucas, Max, Will, Joyce and Mike who had just pulled up, all awaiting their arrival. When they got out of the car, Max gave El a sneaky wink. El grinned, making sure her dad wasn't watching. She was looking forward to filling in her best friend on everything that had happened after she and Mike had left the lake.

Mike and Dustin moved forward to help Hunter and Emma with their

bags, whilst Hopper and Joyce went to the station office to collect their tickets. As El watched her two fellow subjects, she felt a hollow pain take over her stomach. She was going to miss them so much, they were part of her family and always would be.

El moved forward and linked arms with Hunter and Emma, they all beamed at each other and walked forward to the platform, nothing needing to be said for the moment as they all enjoyed a few more minutes together.

The party gave them a respectable distance until Hopper and Joyce came back with the tickets. "Here you go kid," Her dad said to Hunter handing him the papers.

Hunter grinned up at Hopper, "thank you...for *everything*." The two men shared a brief hug surprising the party except for El who knew that they had grown close. Very much like father and son.

Joyce stepped forward and hugged both Hunter and Emma, making them promise to call and giving them both a care package of food. They thanked her and embraced her too.

All of the party stepped forward now and hugged their two new friends. El watched Hunter and Mike embrace in a brotherly hug, both of them talking quietly to one another which she couldn't really pick up on. She saw their warm smiles and the genuine emotions in their eyes, so whatever they were talking about was only good things.

Emma stepped up to El and both girls smiled at each other before wrapping themselves up in a tight hug. "Thank you for everything El." Emma sniffed into her shoulder.

El felt tears escape her eyes but she tried to smile through it. "Thank you for opening up. I'm going to miss you so much."

Emma broke out of the hug and the girls squeezed each other's hands. "I'm going to miss you too. You're a great friend."

The girls both sighed, their emotions heavy on their chests. El looked over at Hunter who was having a hug from Will. She couldn't help but smirk slightly as she looked back at Emma. "Any updates?" she

said indicating the handsome blonde.

Emma blushed and leaned in with a nod, "we kissed last night." She whispered. It took everything in El not to squeal too loudly.

"That's amazing! Please keep me posted okay? You are going to write? And send me your number as soon as you arrive?" El said in a rush of excitement. Emma laughed and nodded, "of course."

Max came over to hug Emma and El broke off, knowing it was time to say goodbye to Hunter, but not really wanting to. He had been there for her, every single time for over two years. Yes, they had shared one kiss but it was in the heat of the moment, but he had never taken advantage of her, even at her darkest hours. He was a true friend, in fact he was now like a brother to her. He had saved Mike's life. If it wasn't for him, she would be without her soul mate right now, El knew deep down she would probably be dead.

Hunter spotted her and they met in the middle of the crowd, both of them with sad smiles and watery eyes. "I...I don't even know where to start." Hunter gasped, his voice shaking.

El laughed through her tears and embraced him, her head on his chest and his arms tightly around her as she allowed the tears to finally fall. They just held each other and sniffed for some time.

When they finally pulled away El wiped at her tears and took a deep shaking breath. "I'm never *ever* going to be able to thank you for everything you have done." She told him sobbing slightly.

Hunter side smiled, "I don't need you to thank me. I just need you to be my friend. You're one of my *best* friends. You have to promise me that even though we're going to live a distance away that you visit us. And we can write and call each other. Okay?" he said clearing his throat, trying to get a hold of his emotions.

El grinned and sniffled, "I promise." She said seriously, knowing there was no possible way she could ever just forget about Hunter and Emma. "And will you promise me that you will always be happy and live a good life?" she asked him almost vulnerably.

Hunter immediately smiled warmly and nodded. "I promise." They hugged once more and he gave her a brief chaste kiss on the cheek. El squeezed his hand one last time and then let the boys help with getting the luggage onto the train.

El turned to Mike who had just finished loading on a bag. He turned to her with a calming smile. She knew he would have seen her embrace with Hunter, but there was no longer jealousy in his eyes when he was around her friend.

Mike came over to her and moved his arm around her shoulders, bringing her in closer to his body. El moved her arms around his waist and leaned her head against him, feeling warm and supported.

"You okay?" he whispered to her, his voice laced with love and comfort.

El sniffed and took a deep breath. She knew Hunter and Emma were leaving to have the lives they wanted and she knew they would be happy, that gave her peace of mind and helped her to answer Mike's question. "Yes."

After waving off Hunter and Emma, Hopper and Joyce had gone off to work and Dustin turned to the party suggesting they all go and get brunch seeing as they all had skipped breakfast.

When they entered Benny's, El couldn't stop from grinning brightly as she took in the familiar surroundings. Mike was holding her hand until they were separated by the table. She stared at him with love and he stared back. This was like how it had always been. Will and Dustin facing one another, Max and Lucas facing and then El and Mike. It was a beautiful nostalgic moment.

After eating their food and sipping on their milkshakes, the party got talking about Hunter and Emma again and placing bets on how long it was before they were an official couple. El's guess was two days.

"So when do you reckon we can visit them?" Dustin asked eagerly, looking around at the group but specifically at El.

She could only shrug because whilst she had learnt to drive, she didn't own a car. El turned her eyes to Mike who answered for her. "Well what about spring break?"

They all nodded in agreement. "And then next summer why don't we all go down to California?" Max said making them all peak with interest.

"And we could invite Hunter and Emma too." El said with excitement. She had wanted to go to California ever since Max had described it to her when they were 14.

"Yeah totally." Max said smiling as she sipped at her chocolate milkshake. "We can have a road trip and I'll invite you all to my dad and show you how to surf board."

"As long as we don't get bitten by a shark," Will said smirking slightly but El could read the slight fear in his eyes, despite the Jaws poster she knew was still on his bedroom wall.

Max rolled her eyes, "you'll be fine as long as they don't think you're a seal...so Dustin you're screwed." She teased making them all laugh except their curly haired friend who scowled at her.

"Well they'll probably think you're a clown fish with all that orange hair." Dustin bit back.

Before Max could retort, Lucas put his hands in between them. "Calm down you too." He laughed.

"I'll keep the sharks from you." El said turning to Dustin with a smile. He beamed and looked at the others, "thanks El. so I've got myself a body guard...beat that!"

"Well I think the *real* problem we're going to have for you boys, is that me and El will get to see Hunter with his top off again." Max joked earning a snort from El and an eye roll from Mike and Lucas. Dustin and Will thought the other boys reactions were hilarious.

El turned to her boyfriend amused by his reaction and she couldn't stop her words. "Your body is perfect." She told him boldly. Mike's eyes widened in surprised and he seemed to ignore the laughter of his

friends and gave El a confident smile as her words clearly soaked straight into his heart.

They all laughed and talked about nothing particularly important which warmed El's chest. This is what she wanted, to be normal, to argue about Star Wars theories, to laugh at Mike's Yoda impression which now made his voice break as he was too old for the high-pitched voice and to fall in love every time she looked into his dark eyes. She felt truly happy.

Mike's foot was gently stroking against her leg and she smile at him mischievously whilst sipping on her milkshake. Now that they had smashed through the icy wall that surrounded their sexual life together, El wanted him more than ever. All she knew was that she refused to go another day without being intimate with him again. He was like a drug and she couldn't get enough.

"So..." Dustin said breaking through the quiet peace of the group and looking at El and Mike. "Are we going to talk about the fact that you two are in yesterday's clothes?"

Lucas and Max snorted at this, Will cringed and El and Mike both flushed in reaction to the question. El was about to saying something when Mike beat her to the chase.

"Do you *really* want to know the answer to that question?" he asked with a playful grin which made El smile. Usually he would become very embarrassed and tell his friends to shut up, but it seemed Mike was embracing their new sex life as much as El was.

It was Dustin's turn to blush and he quickly shook his head and said a long and playful, "*no!*"

Mike pulled up onto the drive of his house that afternoon with El in the passenger seat. His mom was out at book club, his dad was working and Holly was in school. They'd have the house to themselves.

As he unlocked the door, he watched El's eager smile as she looked around the house. Mike quickly closed the door and followed her

around like a lost puppy. It made his stomach squirm with butterflies and his heart quiver with love when he realised she was taking everything in, as if she had missed it.

They got up to his room and Mike watched slightly self-consciously as El went immediately over to his desk with surprise. He had photo frames on the desk, one photo of the whole party and three framed photos of him and El. Their prom photo was on his bedside table as well as the photo of them at their first snow ball together.

When El turned back around to him she had tears in her eyes. Mike didn't even need to ask her what was wrong, he understood immediately because his eyes had become watery too. They both couldn't believe this was real, they were back together and in some ways, it was like they had never been parted. They rushed into each other's arms, just holding one another in their secure embrace. Mike kissed El's forehead gently as he breathed in the smell of her hair. He closed his eyes, not knowing if they were in their hold for hours or minutes.

Mike changed his clothes and watched with amusement as El stole one of his sweaters and threw it on over her white sun dress. "I still have one of your sweaters you know." She told him playfully as she gave the new sweater a little content sniff.

"Really?" he asked in surprise, feeling immediately happy at the fact that she had a piece of his clothing through the years.

El nodded lovingly in response and Mike took her hand, feeling so peaceful. "Do you fancy some eggos?" he asked her amused already knowing what her response would be.

"Yes!" she almost squealed before letting him lead her out of his bedroom and down to the kitchen. Whilst Mike got to work making the eggos he noticed El wander off into the basement. He stayed in the kitchen until the eggos were done, putting them on a plate and following his girlfriend into the basement.

He noticed immediately that she was laying in the pillow fort with a smile on her face. She turned her head to him as he walked down the stairs. "I can't believe you kept it up..." El mused.

Mike smiled rather shyly and shrugged, "I just always hoped you would come back." He said honestly.

El watched him quietly as he passed her the plate and then crouched to get into the fort with her. She giggled as he had to almost crawl because he was so tall. Mike rolled his eyes at her amusement and finally managed to lay next to her, his feet hanging out the other end of the fort.

They munched on the eggos in comfortable silence for a moment, both of them in a world of their own as they thought about the events of the last two years and how they ended up back here. But Mike always knew that deep down they would always end up back with each other. They were soul mates.

At one point, he had thought he would truly lose El, not to the scary aspects of her troubled life, but to a new threat. To another man. It had been something that hadn't feared him before until it was so close to actually happening.

When they finished their eggos, El put the plate to the side and Mike turned to her, a little hesitant and scared to ask the question that was now bugging him terribly. "Would you have been happy with Hunter?" he said it in almost a whisper, a vulnerability springing up in his voice.

El turned to him with surprise. They were both holding up their upper bodies with their elbows. She considered him for a moment and then shrugged casually, "Maybe...but I don't *love* him." She paused and her eyes became instantly warm as she stared into his dark orbs. "I love *you*. I'm *happier* with you and always will be."

Mike felt love flood through his entire body and he had to hold back a sob at how much her words meant to him. He stared back into her astoundingly beautiful and expressive eyes and just from that one look he knew how much she loved him. He hoped he would get the chance to prove his love to her every single day for the rest of his life.

As Mike looked at El, in their fort he couldn't stop a cheeky lopsided smile appear on his lips as he moved closer to her. One arm snaking

around her body as she giggled in his embrace. He brought his face down to hers, his forehead leaning against her as they stared intently at one another. The fire in their eyes was evident.

"And I'm about to make you even *more* happier..." He whispered seductively before their lips crashed together in a thrill of passion. El pulled him on top of her and gasped and moaned as they were totally enveloped into their feelings of love, want and trust. She knew her words were always going to be true, Mike was the only one, he had always been the only one, she was and always would be happier with him.

AN: I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Please let me know what you thought. I may or may not have cried writing this chapter as it's the last one :-(Just the epilogue to go now!

16. Epilogue

Happier With You

AN: And this is where we end the Happier With You story! I want to thank everyone who has read this story, followed, favourited and left reviews. You are all so amazing and kept me motivated. I will now be concentrating on my story The Life You Deserve before moving on to other Mileven projects I have waiting in the wings!

I hope you enjoy this epilogue, a little taster into the lives Mileven are now leading :-)

Epilogue

Winter, 1990

Mike sat inside one of the smaller and cosier coffee shops on the MIT campus whilst he waited impatiently for El. She was currently at an interview at the Hayden library for the library assistant job that she desperately wanted.

He nursed a coffee and looked out of the frosted window every few seconds to see if he could see El approaching. She was due to have finished by now and Mike was growing edgy.

Mike had every faith that El would do excellent in the interview and he hoped she would get the job. What bothered him was the pressure she put on herself to obtain the position, not really understanding the fact that 6 other people had gone for the job too.

The bell above the coffee shop door dinged and Mike looked up quickly, a smile appearing immediately on his face as he watched his girlfriend make a bee line for him. She looked so beautiful in her smart black dress and heels.

El's face was a picture of joy and as she quickly rushed to him, she shouted, "I did it! I got the *job*!"

"Really?!" Mike gasped in excitement, standing up just in time before

El jumped into his arms. He held her tight, feeling so whole and happy when she was back in his arms.

She pulled away just enough to look at his face. He gazed at her, taking in her vibrant smile and her bright eyes. "Yes! They told me straight after the interview. I start Monday." El said eagerly.

Mike beamed and leaned in, his hands gently holding El's face as he pressed his lips to her tenderly. "I'm so proud of you babe." He said sighing with happiness against her mouth. They both couldn't stop the grins on their faces.

Mike and El had been in Cambridge, Massachusetts since the end of September and had found a small one bedroom townhouse that had become their home for the past three months.

El had loved the change of pace that Cambridge offered compared to Hawkins, they enjoyed the vibrant city, the walks along the Charles river and most importantly living together. They had little disagreements over who's turn it was to do the dishes and clean the bathroom but they were otherwise blissfully happy.

"Let me get you a celebratory drink. What would you like?" Mike asked brightly as he turned to the board littered with drink options.

"Hmm...hot chocolate please." She said smiling.

"With extra cream and cocoa powder?" Mike asked her with a grin.

El grinned, her eyes creasing with happiness. "You know me well!"

Mike ordered and paid for the hot chocolate before they moved back to the table in front of the window and discussed her new job.

"So what department are you going to be working in?" Mike asked with interest as he stirred his coffee.

"Well they said I'll be doing a bit of everything really. But mainly humanities and science." El answered smiling proudly at her achievement.

"Brilliant. So I'll get to see a very sexy brunette in the library science

department soon." Mike said giving El a mischievous grin making her giggle.

"Mike, I need to be *professional* you know." She teased him, giving him a cheeky smirk at his comment.

"And you will be." Mike assured before adding with a lopsided smile, "but that doesn't mean I won't be checking you out."

El bit her lip with amusement and sipped at her hot chocolate.

After spending another hour in the coffee shop, Mike and El headed out of the campus and towards their townhouse which was a 15-minute walk. Usually they enjoyed the walk, but El was moaning about her heels.

"Come here," Mike said rolling his eyes with an amused smile on his face. El smiled in relief and hopped onto his back, her legs wrapping around his waist and her hands placed gently on Mike's shoulders as he kept her secure by holding onto her legs.

"Off home we go!" Mike sang as he walked down the street towards their house. El grinned and leaned in to press a kiss on his neck. He felt a shiver of pleasure run down his spine at the innocent gesture.

"You're my home." She said in a sweet voice making Mike's heart leap with joy. He tried to turn to smile at her as he carried on walking, a happy grin on his face. "And you're *my* home."

El pressed another kiss to his neck and sighed contently. Mike carried on piggy backing her in silence for a while until she spoke again. "Mike do you think we will always live in Massachusetts?"

Mike pondered the question and shrugged slightly. "If you want to babe. I love it here, but I guess it depends on jobs and our children."

"*Children?*" El asked with curious excitement.

Mike felt himself blushing slightly, "er yeah children. Do you...do you not think about stuff like that?" he asked self-consciously.

El smiled, "I haven't really thought about it much. But...I think I love

the idea." She said making Mike grin.

"Cool." Mike said with a little shy smile on his face.

"So how many would we have?" El asked with interest.

Mike smiled to himself as he imagined his and El's future children. "Well I've always liked the idea of us having two. Ideally a boy and a girl. But I know it doesn't always work out that way." He said shrugging before deciding to add, "I think I'd like us to get married first though."

El beamed and tucked her head into his broad shoulder again. "You've really thought about it all haven't you." She mused happily.

Mike stopped walking for a moment so that he could turn his head to El and give her a chaste kiss. "I think about it a lot." He admitted smiling brightly.

El sighed happily and leaned in for another kiss. The feel of her lips on his was incredible, every time it felt like hundreds of fireworks were being set off.

"I can't wait for our future." El said grinning. Mike beamed at her, looking deep into her hazel eyes. "I can't wait either."

They smiled blissfully at one another, knowing that no matter what their future held, it would always be perfect as long as they were together.

Summer, 1996.

El was in the master bedroom of her three bedroomed house, a large suitcase lay on the bed whilst she folded clean clothes and placed them inside neatly. It hadn't taken very long over the years for El to realise that Mike's packing skills were very poor.

She finally zipped the case with a sigh of relief and went downstairs, ready to ask her husband to lift the heavy suitcase into the car. El was just about to go into the living room when she halted. A warm smile crept up her face as she leaned against the door frame and

watched her husband with their 1 year old son James.

Mike was stood in front of the book case with a gurgling James held on his hip. "Mu-ma" their happy baby said pointing at their wedding photo.

"Yes baby that's mommy and daddy on our wedding day. That was literally *just* before you decided you wanted to be created." He said teasing, making El grin to herself. It had certainly been a memorable wedding night.

"And that's daddy with your uncle Will, Dustin and Lucas." Mike said gesturing to the original science fair photo that El had pointed to all those years back in Mike's childhood bedroom.

James laughed and bounced slightly on Mike's hip leaning up with all his effort to reach one of his daddy's curls and tugging on it. Mike beamed at their son and kissed his forehead. "Yeah sorry you're stuck with my black curls baby and not your mommy's beautiful hair."

"I love you hair though," El finally said walking into the room. Mike turned with James and grinned at her, James smiled and giggled, "mu-ma!"

"Hi baby," El said brightly, her hands reaching out for their beautiful son. James, named after her dad was very much a mini Mike. He had all of his features and dark locks that were just starting to curl. The only main feature he had of El's was her hazel eyes.

James reached out his chunky arms for El and Mike pretended to throw him back and forwards three times, causing their baby to giggle loudly before on the fourth time Mike passed him into El's waiting arms.

"Why do I have a naked baby and not a dressed baby?" El asked Mike playfully, raising her eyebrow in fake annoyance.

Mike laughed, "sorry we got distracted But in my defence he has a diaper on."

El grinned, "that's only because you don't want him peeing on you again."

"Or shitting." Mike mumbled.

"Language!" El said scolding him before bringing James up for a kiss. "While I get James dressed, will you put the suitcase in the car?" She asked him sweetly as she took their baby over to the couch where his clothes were waiting.

"Yeah of course babe. West Virginia here we come!" Mike said calling loudly in excitement before heading up the stairs.

El laughed to herself at her husband's eagerness. Every summer all of the subjects had a reunion. They had been doing it for the last 6 years and all took it in turns to visit each other's homes. This time it was Hunter and Emma's turn.

As the years had gone by the subjects were joined by their partners and then children when they had come along. It was always a good time but El was particularly excited about going to Hunter and Emma's because they had been renovating a farm for the past year and it was finally completed.

"Da-da?" James asked whilst El put on his body suit. "Daddy's just upstairs baby." She answered him with a smile. James was very much a daddy's boy when it came to playing and a mommy's boy when he needed comforting.

El was just putting James's shoes on when Mike came back into the living room slightly out of breath. "Right everything's in the car. I just need my wife and son." He said grinning as he walked over to his little family and came up behind El, giving her a tender kiss on her cheek and pulling her against him.

She couldn't help but bite her lip with excitement at his touch. They lead a very busy life, Mike worked as a biomedical engineer and El was a librarian after completing her degree through work, but they always managed to find time for each other. El didn't think she would be able to function without their date nights, trips away and even just cuddles on the couch with both of her boys.

The young family headed to their car ready to travel to Boston and then fly to Charleston. El settled in the passenger seat and lay her

hand on Mike's thigh, smiling at him before glancing back now and again at James, tucked into his car seat and playing with his toy steering wheel. This was just perfection to El. She had never truly understood the unconditional love her mama had for her and even Joyce and her dad until she had James. Just like Mike, there wasn't anything she wouldn't do for her son. She would risk anything and everything for him. But for now, she got to enjoy a simple and wonderful life and she would never take that for granted.

Mike was more than relieved when they finally reached Apple Brook Farm. Plane travel with a 1 year old wasn't the best. James had hated take off, his ears popping and unable to be soothed by either Mike or El for the next 10 minutes. Finally they were able to distract him with snacks and a picture book and enjoy the rest of their flight.

They had picked up their rental car which thankfully had air con in the sweltering heat of West Virginia in summer and James fell asleep on the hour car journey, giving El and Mike a chance to have a bit of grown up conversation for a change.

Now they were in front of the beautiful farm, James lay on Mike's front, his arms protectively around his son as they made their way to the front porch. They didn't even make it to the door before Hunter came out to greet them.

"El! Mike! So good to see you!" he said warmly, giving El a hug before giving Mike a side hug to avoid the baby. "And hello James!" Hunter said kindly, ruffling his dark locks. James gave him a shy smile, but kept his head on Mike's chest.

"So everyone's here, they're all in the back yard. Come through." Hunter said happily, giving them a tour of the renovated farm house. Mike couldn't help but be impressed, "you've done a great job." He said looking around.

"Thanks man. It was worth the effort. You should see Bella's room." Hunter said as he took them through the kitchen to the back door. Bella was Emma and Hunter's baby girl, she was 9 months old now.

"Well if you fancy doing up our kitchen let us know." Mike grinned

making El roll her eyes with amusement. "It's only a little out dated Mike." She told him as they walked out of the back door.

Before Mike could respond he took in the scene of five children of different ages running around the large yard, screaming and laughing as they played. There was a large wooden table where Kali sat with her husband, Sam stood his arms on the shoulders of his wife and Fifi was sat with Emma who was bouncing Bella on her lap. They all shouted and greeted El, Mike and James warmly as they walked over.

El went around hugging her soul siblings and their partners and Mike followed suit, putting a curious James down who stared at the other children with awe.

"Hey Bella!" Mike said in a sing song voice as Emma came up to him with her young daughter in her arms. Bella smiled and giggled and Emma gave Mike a kiss on the cheek. "It's so lovely to see you all. I've made lemonade if you want some." She said kindly.

Mike looked at the table to see a very refreshing and welcoming big jug of lemonade, glasses and various snacks littered on the surface. "Don't mind if I do," he joked before pouring a glass for him and El.

Hunter put out a paddling pool for the kids after lunch and the parents all sat lazily watching their children squeal and splash about. James was sat on the floor with Bella, poking her curiously on the cheek making her giggle which in turn made him laugh loudly.

"Hey Mike, I believe your son is making a move on my daughter." Hunter teased making them all laugh.

"Well she could do worse. He's as dashing as his dad." Mike joked making them all grin and laugh.

"I second that," El said grinning and leaning her head on Mike's shoulder. He bent his head slightly and kiss the top of her head in thanks.

"Can you believe we get to live like this now?" Emma said quietly to the group.

"What do you mean?" Hunter asked curiously, his arm around his

wife.

"We get to lead...*normal* lives." Emma said looking at them all.

Mike couldn't help but smile softly, she was right and it was what they all deserved after everything they had been through.

"It didn't come without its sacrifices." Kali said wisely, to which the group nodded sombrely. Over the years El had told Mike more about her time with the other subjects and the stories of the subjects who had died at the lab due to experiments or had been murdered at the hands of Brenner, it made Mike's blood run cold to think that could have happened to El.

"Well that's why we need to lead the best lives we can now. To honor the others." El said calmly. Mike beamed at her with love and sincerity. El was incredibly smart, strong and just an amazing mother, wife, daughter and friend. He didn't think he'd ever be able to put into words how proud of her he was.

"Well let's raise a toast shall we? To absent friends." Sam said raising his glass.

"To absent friends!" the group all called, lifting their glasses to join his.

As the sun started to fall on the horizon and the fire flies flickered in the background, Mike watched as El cradled James, rocking him gently to sleep, singing softly to him under her breath. His heart didn't think it could get any bigger, but then he would see his wife and son and he could feel his heart flutter all over again.

Mike wrapped his arm around El and she snuggled into his chest with a hum of satisfaction, James now snoozing in her arms. They both looked down at their baby, created from the love they shared for each other. He was the evidence that life could move on, that things wouldn't always be dark and that true happiness did exist.

Mike wouldn't trade his wife and son for anything, never in a million lifetimes would he be as content and happy as he was now. He truly had found his home, ever since he was 12 years old. And now that he

knew the meaning of love and the meaning of happiness, he would lead a wonderful life with his family knowing that he truly had everything he could have ever wanted.